

Custer

THE LAST OF THE CAVALIERS

Frazier Hunt

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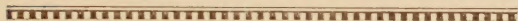


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CUSTER

The Last of the Cavaliers





GENERAL CUSTER

CUSTER

The Last of the Cavaliers

by

FRAZIER HUNT

Illustrated by

CAPTAIN JOHN W. THOMASON



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To
COLONEL CHARLES FRANCIS BATES,
U. S. A., Retired,
Custer historian, whose generous
assistance made this book possible.

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CUSTER

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THE LAST OF THE CAVALIERS

CHAPTER ONE

FROM the high, rolling bluffs to the east of the Little Bighorn, came the sound of heavy firing.

The troopers here on the hill three miles to the south could hear it distinctly. No one could doubt that their comrades, greatly outnumbered by the Indian hordes, were fighting desperately.

They themselves had just come through a terrifying experience; led by their panic-stricken commander Major Reno, they had given up their attack on the Indian village in the valley across the river, left their strong position in the woods, and in a mad rout had gained this high, barren point of ground.

Benteen—he of the lion heart—coming up from the rear where he had been scouting, joined them now with three fresh troops. In his pocket was a crumpled bit of paper that had reached him twenty minutes before. It was from the senior officer of the regiment now fighting so stubbornly with five troops, three miles to the north. It had been hurriedly scribbled on a leaf torn from a field note-book:

“Benteen, come on—big village—be quick—bring packs. P. bring pac’s.”

It was a command. It was a call for help. It was one soldier saying to another that the big fight was over here, and to hurry up with his soldiers and the ammunition mules.

But for ten years Benteen had been the irreconcilable enemy and critic of the man who had sent this order. Reno, too, was a sworn enemy of the man fighting on the bluffs to the north.

Benteen, blinded by hate, dismounted his troopers. Reno, shaken with fear, raised his pistol and fired at an Indian a thousand yards away.

The Indians had drawn off—they had followed Reno’s men in the rout from the valley—

but now they had turned their swift war ponies toward the battle-field to the north. Not a single brave was in sight.

Steadily the sound of firing drifted down from the north. Junior officers and old non-coms cursed under their breath—they knew where their duty lay.

"Great God! Why don't we go to Custer?" they swore.

But the two ranking officers made no move.

Thirty precious minutes slipped by—then sixty.

Still came the sound of guns—the sound that all soldiers of all times and armies have answered, even into the teeth of death.

The ammunition mules jogged up—the priceless ammunition that had been called for. Still they hesitated, chatting and fuming and fussing, while to the north less than one-third of their beloved regiment with its commanding officer was facing some great unknown test.

Now the firing grew fainter. Then came the dull heavy roar of two distinct volleys. It was a call for help.

Custer was calling for them—Custer, their

commander—Custer, the darling of the gods—Custer, the romantic boy general of the Civil War—Custer, the matchless Indian-fighter—Custer, the last of the cavaliers.

The end was coming swiftly now—the end of a brilliant and colorful life. Custer luck was running out, like the last bits of sand in an hour-glass.

All but a handful of those who had ridden away with him, two short hours before, had already been killed—and now on the knoll of the highest bluff the little group clung closely around the man they loved and trusted. Long ago they had shot their horses, and using them as a breastwork, were calmly selling their lives as dearly as they could. They were old soldiers, all.

A hundred times this sweltering afternoon their tall golden-haired leader had shaded his eyes and looked toward the south. Benteen would be coming from that direction—Benteen with his three troops and fresh ammunition. He had sent for him, and he would come.

Why didn't he come!

Benteen! Reno! *Benteen!*

The shadows of death were closing in now. The little circle of men tightened. Their leader standing in their center took one last look to the south. Then he spoke quietly to them. All hope was gone. Only a stubborn dozen were left.

The Indians were preparing for their final charge. They were sweeping in from all sides—hundreds of screaming, painted warriors . . . blinding dust . . . pungent smell of burning powder . . . piercing whoops . . . flashing hoofs of war ponies. . . .

So it was the romantic Custer met his end on that Sunday afternoon in June, 1876, on the Little Bighorn in Montana. Of the two hundred and twelve men and officers with him that day, no man returned, and two days later, when they buried the stripped bodies of these brave fighters, they buried forever the full story of his tragic stand.

A brigadier-general at twenty-three, a major-general at twenty-five, a great Indian-fighter at twenty-seven, he went to his death at thirty-seven, the immortal hero of American youth—and the mystery and gallantry of his death will

keep his name shining, when all but a scant dozen of the great figures of American military history will be forgotten forever.

But we must turn back to the beginning.

It is December 5, 1839, on a little farm in Harrison County, Ohio, near the border of Pennsylvania. It isn't much of a farm—but a good deal more of one than Lincoln, or Jackson, or Garfield knew.

Ohio was a young and pretty crude state then—it took thirty or forty years more before she was in a position to test seriously Virginia's right to be called "the mother of Presidents."

There were no Indians around eastern Ohio at this time, but it was still a pioneer state. A man to live and prosper had to have a good deal of practical common sense; he had to know about the earth and the seasons, the moon and the weather, how to save a litter of pigs, and how to cure a sick animal. He had to know a thousand and one things that you can't learn out of books.

Emmanuel H. Custer, who owned this particular farm, had come from Crysoptown, Alleghany County, Maryland, and as a young man

had been a blacksmith. He had worked hard and saved his money, and finally bought a farm. When he was twenty-two he married a young woman, and in six years was blessed with three children. Then his wife died, and three years later he married a widow with three children of her own. Her maiden name had been Maria Ward. As a country girl of sixteen she had married Israel R. Kirkpatrick, and after three children had been born her husband died. The match between the widower Custer and the widow Kirkpatrick, each contributing three children, was almost an ideal one.

On this raw day of December 5, 1839, two years after they were married, Emmanuel, with his coonskin cap pulled down over his ears, and his homespun greatcoat wrapped well around him, dropped in at the crossroads store of the settlement known as New Rumley.

"Got a new boy over at our house," he finally admitted, and then set 'em up to a pinch of snuff all the way around. "Guess we're gonna call him George Armstrong. She wants to."

Six years later, Emmanuel announced another boy who was to bear the name Tom, and as a

boy-soldier in the Civil War was to win two congressional medals of honor; and three years after Tom's birth, the senior Custer told the group in the village store that an eight-pounder, named Boston, had arrived. Then four years later, on a January day in 1852, he was chaffed, because this time it was a daughter—called Margaret.

The Custers came of fighting stock. Emmanuel Custer's grandfather—and the great-grandfather of George Armstrong—had been a Hessian mercenary in the Revolutionary War. He was a curly-haired blonde giant who was fighting for the fun of it. When the war was over and he, with his fellow Hessians, was paroled, he decided to settle down and grow up with the country. The family name of Küster was changed about the time this good-natured Saxon fighter moved from Pennsylvania to Maryland. His grandson, the blacksmith and farmer, felt the call of the frontier and migrated to Ohio, and here it was that the sturdy tow-headed boy was born in 1839.

War was in the air again. The fall of the Alamo down in San Antonio, in the great stretch of country north of the Rio Grande

owned by Mexico, had burned its way into the hearts of the whole country. A bitter hatred was flaring up against Mexico. Peaceful America was getting ready to have her regular one-war-per-generation conflict. Even backwoods settlements in Ohio were thrilled by the righteousness of one-sided patriotism. Silver-tongued orators were making the little red brick school-houses and the white frame churches fairly ring with "Remember the Alamo!"—just as fifty years later, their grandsons were to work the boys up with "Remember the Maine!" The words were slightly different, but the technique was exactly the same.

Emmanuel Custer joined the local militia, the "New Rumley Invincibles," and so our future general, "little Autie"—which was the home-manufactured nickname for Armstrong—teased and teased, until his mother made him a uniform out of one of paw's suits, and paw whittled out a wooden gun for him. By the time the Mexican War came along in earnest, Autie was seven and could go through the old Scott manual of arms along with the best of them.

So it was that even in a backwater of pioneer

life this farmer boy grew up in a warm reflection of the thrilling atmosphere of war.

He dreamed of being a drummer-boy and marching with heroic old General Scott or General Taylor in the Mexican campaigns. Farming was not for him—the saber and the musket were to be his tools.

When he was ten years old, a brand-new world suddenly opened up for him. Pushing back his chair from the supper table one evening, his father looked squarely at his son and began:

“Autie, your sister Lydia up in Monroe, Michigan, seems to be gettin’ powerful lonesome for some of her kin. Your maw got a letter from her today, and she asked if you couldn’t come up and stay with her this winter—and go to school up there. Your maw and I—”

“Aw, please let me, paw. I’d study hard and—”

“Well, both your maw and I think maybe the schools there would be better than the district school we got here. And Lydia says she’ll take good care of you, and that her husband would like to have you come too. Guess Dave Reed is a right nice kind of feller—and your sister is

lonesome being separated from all her kinfolks and being way up there in Michigan.”

“Way up there in Michigan” was perfectly correct in this year of 1849. In point of time, it was as distant as Chicago is from San Francisco today. Even this small frontier town of Monroe was vastly different from the farm and tiny community that had been to date the sum total of Autie’s horizon. There he met new and wiser folk, and before he had finished his second stay in Monroe—this first time he remained two years, attending Stebbins Academy, and then later returned for a second two years at the more advanced and polished “Seminary”—his dream of being a drummer-boy had bloomed into a determined ambition to go to West Point and become an officer and a professional soldier.

At sixteen—a tall, well-set-up, smiling lad of quick, almost nervous speech—he returned to his father’s farm and secured a job teaching in a country school at Hopedale, Ohio, not far from home. Most of his \$26 monthly wage he turned over to his mother; and what with the Mexican War boom prices long ago over, and with babies coming along, the money was put to good use.

Country schools were let out early in the spring in those days, so that the farmer boys could help put in the crops, and as soon as the short term closed, young Custer enrolled in the McNeely Normal School in Hopedale. On Friday nights he would go home, and on one of these evenings after supper, he expounded a very important idea to his sturdy, sensible father:

"Paw, I want to go to West Point, and the only way I can go is to get Congressman Bingham to give me an appointment. Can you write Mr. Bingham a letter for me?"

The senior Custer teetered back in his chair and roared. "That's a good one, Autie. Don't you know Bingham wouldn't give a Democrat like us a postage stamp? And I wouldn't ask him for one, nuther. We're Democrats, son—good, honest Democrats, and I don't want no truck with these Frémont Republicans. If our congressman was one of us, you bet your boots I'd do everything I could to help you get the appointment, but I ain't going to ask any favors of any Republican that ever lived. We're dyed-in-the-wool, yard-wide Democrats, and don't you ever forget it, son."

"Well, I'm not afraid to ask Congressman Bingham to send me to West Point," the sixteen-year-old boy declared. "I'll write him a letter tonight."

A half-hour later he brought the letter to his father, and asked him to read it. The letter young Custer had written is still preserved:

May 27th, 1856

To the Hon. John A. Bingham

SIR: Wishing to learn something in relation to the matter of appointment of cadets to the West Point Military Academy, I have taken the liberty of addressing you on the subject. My only apology for thus intruding on your notice is that I cannot obtain such information here. And as the matter is to be finally settled in Washington, I have thought better to make application at headquarters from the beginning. If in the multiplicity of your duties, which I know you must have on hand, you can find time to inform me as to the necessary qualifications for admission, and if our congressional district is unrepresented there or not, or at least when there will be a vacancy, you will confer a great favor on me.

I am desirous of going to West Point, and

I think my age and tastes would be in accordance with its requirements. But I must forbear on that point for the present. I am now in attendance at the McNeely Normal School in Hopedale, and could obtain from the principal, if necessary, testimonials of moral character. I would also say that I have the consent of my parents in the course which I have in view. Wishing to hear from you as soon as convenient,

I remain

Yours respectfully

G. A. CUSTER

In due course, young Custer received a letter from the congressman—in the official franked envelop in government use—advising him that, although there was a vacancy at present, another young man probably would be given the place. Undaunted, Custer replied almost immediately:

MCNEELY NORMAL SCHOOL

Thursday, June 11, 1856.

Hon. John A. Bingham

Dear Sir: Yours of the fourth was duly received and I feel myself compelled to write again to express my sincere thanks for your prompt attention, explicit informa-

tion as to qualifications, etc. I will also add that in all the points specified I would come under the requirements set forth in your communication, being about seventeen years of age, [our hero stretching the cold truth by a little matter of six months], above the medium height, and of remarkable strong constitution and vigorous frame. If that young man from Jeff. County of whom you spoke does not push the matter, I shall be glad to hear from you.

Yours with great respect

G. A. CUSTER

"The young man from Jeff. County" did get the appointment, but that summer when Congressman Bingham returned from his pleasant duties in Washington, young Custer went to see him, and although from a pronounced Democratic family, and without the slightest shred of political or social assistance, made such a favorable impression that Bingham promised to let him try for a West Point appointment that would come vacant the following year.

That year of waiting Custer divided in attending the Normal School—where he wisely specialized in mathematics—in teaching a short winter

term in a country school, and in helping on the farm. Late in the following spring the official-looking document announcing Custer's appointment to a cadetship arrived from Washington, and on a June day, a few weeks later, he, in company with a half-dozen other boys, got off the Hudson River Albany boat at West Point, and carpet bags in hand walked up the steep incline to the academy grounds high above the beautiful curving river—a road that led him from a colorless, humdrum country life, high up to a brilliant career that time has turned into a thrilling tradition.

CHAPTER TWO

HEY, animal! What's your name?" a very grand cadet barked.

"Custer," the bewildered young man answered.

"Custer, *sir*. Well, Mister Custard, where might you be from?"

"New Rumley, Ohio, sir!"

"Well, Mister Custard, of New Rum, Ohio," the cadet officer fairly shouted, "take that funny-looking bag of yours and go over to yon building and see what they do to you over there. And don't forget to say *sir*, Mister Custard."

What they did to "Mister Custard" was rather long and trying, but it didn't hurt him any. First he was given a very thorough physical examination, then marched over to the old Academic Hall where he faced the Academic Board. This consisted of: Major Richard Delafield, the superintendent, a very distinguished officer of the United States Army Engineer Corps—for West Point at this time was directly under the Engineer Corps and all the superintendents were

from this branch of the service; the commandant, Colonel W. H. Hardee (a great friend of Jefferson Davis, and later a lieutenant-general in the Confederate Army) and the several professors.

Custer successfully passed both the physical and academic examinations, and forthwith became a full-fledged "plebe." For three whole weeks the plebes were temporarily assigned to a barracks that bore the unsavory title of "Beast Barracks," since they harbored these unspeakable plebe "animals." At the end of this period, Custer and his brother classmen, having been duly uniformed and equipped, were marched to the tent encampment on the north end of the academy plain, and there camped for the rest of the summer.

Cadet hazing at this time had not become the pet aversion of congressional committees that it was to be later on, so Custer "pulled in his chin," "toed in," recited bits of poetry, and double-timed and "sir'd" to the entertainment of those haughty favorites of God, the cadets of the upper classes.

A year later, when Custer shed the garments



CADET CUSTER, UPON GRAD-
UATION FROM WEST POINT
from a photograph taken in 1861.

of plebe servitude and stepped forth as an upper classman, he quickly became one of the master hazers in the history of the academy. They tell tales to this day of the droll genius that Custer showed in handling plebs.

With a fresh batch of plebes there came one man with a beard. Now at this time custom let the beard grow rather wild, and over the broad expanses of America were tens of thousands of young men, even as young as eighteen, who were so adorned.

Custer, stepping up to this example in question, very politely asked him his name.

"Myers, sir," the plebe answered.

"Well, Mr. Myers, I am very sorry but there seems to have been a serious mistake here somehow or other," Custer explained. "I think you had better go right home, Mr. Myers, and send your son."

It was all great fun to Custer, and fun was the fountain and mainspring of his life. The serious business of study, or of winning cadet honors of any kind, academic or military, never entered young Custer's head. The humorous hazing of plebes, spinning yarns of the odd charac-

ters about his home, slipping out of bounds to the forbidden but hospitable fireside of Benny Havens—where food and drink could be illegally obtained—smiling and laughing his way along with kindly affection for most of his brother cadets, made up the sum total of his West Point years.

From the start he gained a place among the "Immortals," the ten lowest in scholarship (now called by the far less inspiring title of "Goats"). The first year he barely gained this unenviable honor, standing 58 in a class of 68. His second or "yearling" year he was two above the bottom, ranking number 58 in a class of 60. But in his third year he came fully into his own at the bottom of his class, No. 57 in a class of 57—and upon graduation No. 35 in a class of 35.

Ranking neck and neck with his scholarship, went his deportment. He was "skinned" time and again for every trifling offense against the dignity and order of this severe academy. He simply could not obey all the hundred and one petty rules laid down for cadet behavior. Discipline was not for him, then or afterwards; gallant soldier that he became, he always found

it difficult to accept hard and fast orders from a superior. Not that he did not obey men whom he worshiped, like McClellan and Sheridan, but there was about him something of the free agent—the lone wolf—that made him champ and suffer under the strictness and unelastic boundaries of ordinary military life. In the field, with a cavalry command to lead, and with orders to charge and gain a definite objective, the United States Army—and few armies in the world for that matter—never had a finer, more high-spirited and successful cavalry leader. But it is to be doubted whether West Point or the regular army has had an officer whose very being was more unsuited to tiresome discipline.

In a dusty old sheepskin-bound volume, hidden away in the files in the basement of the administration building at West Point, can be found today Custer's "skin sheet," bearing the list of offenses Cadet Custer was reported for. Written in a Spencerian hand, the ink almost faded after these seventy years, the long array spreads over six pages.

In all there are 453 separate "skins," with a total of 812 demerits; with 75, or a third, al-

lowed off during his plebe year. During the course, a cadet is allowed 835 demerits before he is dismissed, so Custer had 23 more to go when he graduated.

The first "skin" is dated July 23, 1857, and reads as follows: "Not casting eyes to the front after being ordered to do so at parade—two demerits."

Among these 453 separate offenses marked down, can be found every conceivable minor cadet crime: not saluting properly; overcoat unbuttoned; late at parade; visiting another cadet's room without permission; talking in ranks; lights in quarters after taps; gazing about in ranks at parade; bedding not arranged according to police regulations at 10 P. M.; making boisterous noise in barracks from 8 to 9 P. M.; no bayonet at inspection; not shaved at guard mount; late at dinner; taking wrong horse at cavalry drill; highly unmilitary and trifling conduct of throwing stones on post at 3:30 P. M.; off cadet limits in rear of confectionery store at 5:30 P. M.; bread, butter, potatoes, plates, knives and forks in quarters 9:30 P. M.; and then at the bottom of the last sheet under date

of June 29, 1861, when he was cadet officer of the guard—"officer of the guard gross neglect of duty, not suppressing a quarrel in the immediate vicinity of the guard tent, he being present 8 to 9 P. M., 5 demerits."

Of all these 453 "skins" the only serious one was this very last, committed at the moment when his class was expecting immediate orders to be graduated a year ahead of their time, and to be hurried into the war—an exaggerated offense which brought Custer to the brink of disgrace and disaster.

It would be almost impossible to overestimate what the four years at West Point had done to this blond-haired, smiling, six-foot farmer boy from eastern Ohio. Its fine traditions had sunk deep into his heart and mind. Without his being in the least aware of it, the magnificent spirit of the place—reflected in the three words of its motto: Duty—Honor—Country—had given for him a tone, a resonance to the ancient business of arms. It was as if someone had taken him by the hand to a hilltop and shown him the glory of mounted knights in armor, going forth to war, for honor, for renown—and for the battles' sake.

In the very air of West Point he breathed the greatness of the sword. Washington, Hamilton, Knox, Putnam, Anthony Wayne, Baron Steuben, the brilliant young French engineer La Radière, who gave his life for the revolutionary cause, and the romantic Thaddeus Kosciusko, the Polish patriot—these, and a score of others, had fought, and labored, and suffered on its plains and hills during the days of the Revolution.

To be thrown from a homely half-frontier fireside into this training school of heroes, could not but mark this gay young blade of a Custer. The profession of arms was a natural one for him, just as it had been for his paternal great-grandfather, the tawny-haired Küster of Burgoyne's Hessian mercenaries.

About West Point hung the glamor of chivalry. Its sons had made brilliant records in the Mexican War. The army officers on duty there, and the entire corps of professors and instructors (who still wore the beautiful old uniform of the Continental Army) were chosen from the finest men in the army. For the four years before Custer entered, Colonel Jefferson Davis, as

Secretary of War in President Pierce's cabinet, had had the general supervision of the academy, and had appointed his friend, Robert E. Lee, as superintendent. Among many improvements wrought, Davis had changed the four years' course to five years, in order that more classical and cultural subjects might be taught.

In a small and intimate school of less than 250 cadets—as against the 1200 there at present—the influence of the officers and staff reached down into the lives of the young men to a pronounced degree. Somehow, the easy-going aristocratic South with its cavalier spirit, had marked the academy much more than the ambitious, bustling, commercial and manufacturing North. And the profession of arms is distinctly for romantic, high-spirited hearts.

Custer, lounging in his room, laughing and talking with fellow classmen, walking off his demerits on the plain for his breaches of discipline, caught abiding glimpses of how thrilling military life could be. Somehow, most of his best friends were Southern boys—gay, care-free lads, many of whom only a short time later were to dash off into death.

Almost every man in Custer's time in West Point was soon to bring glory for himself and his school—and many were to win high honor: Custer, Mackenzie, Merritt, Wilson, Upton, Hardin, Horace Porter for the North; and Rosser, Ramseur, Wheeler, P. M. B. Young, Semmes, Deering, and "the gallant Pelham," as Lee called him, for the South—all brave lads fighting for the right as they saw it. At Fredericksburg, young Pelham, serving under the great "Jeb" Stuart—himself a West-Pointer just before Custer—checked the Federal advance with Custer as a part of it; and after the Confederate victory, taking advantage of a temporary flag of truce, Custer sent this message to his foe and victor, "I rejoice, dear Pelham, in your success."

A few weeks later, Pelham was killed, and his body carried home to his widowed mother in Alabama.

Noble and gentle men, too, were the officers serving at the Point during Custer's years there—Reynolds, who fell mortally wounded at Gettysburg; Webb, Warren, Schofield, McCook, Griffin, Howard, Hazen, Weitzel, Saxton, and Hartsuff in the Union forces; and for the Con-

federacy, Hardee, Alexander, Beauregard, Field, and Fitzhugh Lee, the same fine old warrior, who in '98 put on the blue again, and whose son was lately colonel of Custer's old Seventh Cavalry, the men of which went to death with Custer on the Little Bighorn in Montana.

Happy days, lighted with enduring friendships, were these of Custer's. Off in the outside world, there was some bitter talk going on, but little of it at first reached this quiet soldier monastery on the high banks of the Hudson.

Then in 1859, a courageous old dreamer named John Brown led a fantastic attempt to crumple the government and free the slaves, that ended by his marching to the gallows, while "his soul goes marching on" through eternity.

The Southern cadets were bitter in their denouncements of these mad abolitionists. The handful of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips followers were all but cowed in their defense of John Brown. Custer and the majority of cadets didn't care much one way or the other, but were rather pro-Southern in their sympathies. They wanted to let the whole business cool off and be dropped. But it wasn't to be.

A spirited South Carolinian, Cadet Wade Hampton Gibbes, in a burst of anger brought the issue squarely home to the cadets.

"Damn abolitionists!" he swore. "Nigger lovers! Upton's one of them, associating with niggers in his precious Oberlin college where he went to school."

Someone carried the words to Upton, a New York cadet, for whom a half-century later during the World War, Camp Upton near New York was named.

"Gibbes will have to fight me for that," he answered quietly. "I'll fight him tonight. Go tell him."

That night after the battalion had broken ranks from the march from supper, word went round that a real "battle of the century" was to take place in a room in the First Division.

It was a fight that is still remembered at West Point—a brutal, smashing, slashing fight that proved to the young Southern hot-heads that there was steel and courage in these men of the North whom they had grown to half despise.

It brought the sound of the war-drums home

to West Point. Aloof and removed, the academy had felt itself superior to the insistent rumblings of the impending conflict.

On November 6, 1860, when Abraham Lincoln was elected President, and the divided Democrats went down to defeat, the last hope for peace faded away. To the embittered South, Lincoln's election meant the end of their hope for a peaceful breaking up of the Union and the forming of their own independent government.

For the first time West Point was completely aroused. Sectional lines began to be drawn—but friendly, almost heart-sick lines. Except for the small crowd of very definite antislave cadets from the East and North, there was a tendency to sympathize with the Southerners.

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina formally seceded. Three days previous to this, on information he received from his home, Cadet Henry S. Farley of that state handed in his resignation. He was the first cadet to leave.

The impending war had come squarely to West Point. Farley's resignation was a matter

of deepest interest to every cadet. No one could tell how soon dear and precious friends would be fighting one another.

That evening, Custer's classmate, P. M. B. Young, said to him: "Custer, my boy, we're going to have war. It's no use talking, I see it coming. All the compromises that can be patched up won't avert it. Now let me prophesy what will happen to you and me. You will go home, and your abolition governor will probably make you colonel of a cavalry regiment. I will go down to Georgia, and ask Governor Brown to give me a cavalry regiment. And who knows but we may move against each other during the war.

"You will probably get the advantage of us in the first few engagements, as your side will be rich and powerful, while we will be poor and weak. Your regiment will be armed with the best of weapons, the sharpest of sabers; mine will have only shotguns and scythe-blades; but for all that, we will get the best of the fight in the end, because we will fight for a principle, a cause, while you will fight only to perpetuate the abuse of power."

Good-natured Custer argued that his classmate was handing large bouquets of right and honor to his side, but he didn't argue it very seriously. Only the "Black Republicans" stood foursquare on their ground in those days—and Custer was a Democrat, and his father had come from Maryland.

"Any Southern cadet who wants to leave the academy and go home and fight for his home state has a clear right to," he declared to a hard-shelled Northern boy one afternoon. "I'm going to stick with the Union, but I refuse to hold the slightest bitterness against any Southern cadet or Southern army officer who resigns and follows the fortunes of his own state. I shall always think just as much of them as I do this moment."

The test was to come soon enough. On January 9, 1861, Mississippi seceded, and the day following, Florida left, and the day after that, Alabama. Eight days later, Georgia formally seceded, and on January 26, Louisiana, to be followed on the first of February by Texas. As each state withdrew, its sons among the cadets handed in their resignations and hurried home to

offer their swords to the defense of their mother states.

On December 26, six days after South Carolina had seceded, Major Robert Anderson, a West-Pointer and a Kentuckian, alarmed at the military gesture of the South Carolina state troops, led his little group of regulars from Fort Moultrie to the more secure Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. Major Beauregard, who had served five days as Superintendent of West Point, until on January 28 his very evident intense Southern activities caused the Secretary of War to relieve him, had joined South Carolina's army and was in command of the state troops at Charleston Harbor. It was this Beauregard of West Point, later the famous Confederate general, who on April 12 gave the order to fire on Sumter, and it was the hand of Wade Hampton Gibbes, who two years before had fought the bloody battle with Cadet Upton, that at 4:30 A. M., April 12, pulled the lanyard of the first gun fired.

On March 4, Lincoln had been inaugurated, and the period of spineless inaction was now

ended. Lincoln, determined that he would not strike the first blow, had waited only for that first Southern shot to be hurled at the Stars and Stripes.

April 14, Major Anderson and his heroic little band of regulars, after saluting the flag, marched out of the battered Fort Sumter, and the following day Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers. One short, feverish week later, Virginia slipped out from the Union, and the bloody four years of slaughter was at hand.

The regular class of 1861 was pushed forward, and on May 6 graduated and immediately ordered to Washington. Custer's class, whose five-year time would not be completed until the following year, was polished off on all military studies as rapidly as possible, and on June 30, the following order was read to the excited cadets:

HEADQUARTERS MILITARY
ACADEMY, WEST POINT
June 30, 1861

Order Number 100:

The following members of the First Class Corps of Cadets will be relieved from duty at the Military Academy at reveille tomorrow

morning and by direction of the War Department will repair to Washington City without delay and report in person to the Adjutant-General. . . ."

Custer's name was not on the list.

The very day before this thrilling order to war was read, Custer had committed what was considered a grave breach of rules.

Two cadets settling a personal quarrel had started fighting, when Custer as officer of the guard strolled by. A number of cadets crowding about were on the verge of interfering when Custer pushed his way through the crowd.

"Stand back, boys, let's have a fair fight," Custer shouted. At that very moment, the regular officer of the day came on the scene, and Custer was ordered to the guard tent.

Under arrest in his own tent, while his classmates marched off to war, Custer now suffered one of the bitterest humiliations of his whole life.

"Good God, boys! help me when you get to Washington," he begged his excited, eager classmates, as they packed up that night.

In the old order-book at West Point, there

appears under date of July 5, 1861, this Special Order 106: "The limits of the arrest of Cadet Custer will be the chain of sentinels in rear of cadet line."

A day or two later, came his court-martial trial. The verdict was secretly forwarded to Washington.

Finally, on July 17, Special Order No. 114 was read at West Point: "In accordance with instructions contained in telegram, dated Washington, July 17, 1861, Cadet George A. Custer is relieved from duty at the Military Academy and will repair to Washington City without delay and report to the Adjutant-General in person. By order Colonel Brown."

At last the war was his. Irksome, boyish West Point days were over forever.

Fame and glory and high honor were to be his for the taking.

"Some day I will have a general's star on my shoulder; before this war is over, I will have it," he swore.

In New York, he hurriedly purchased his military equipment, and caught the first train for Washington.

With his saber he would carve out an immortal name for himself. Peace and quiet were for others—for Custer, plunging horses, drawn sabers and the thrilling charge straight into the enemy.

CHAPTER THREE

THREE days after he left the quiet security of West Point, Custer, now a tall, well-built young man of twenty-one, found himself in the fury of the great disaster of Bull Run. For him the whole four years of the war were to be spurts from one reeling encounter to another.

Concerning those first days immediately after his leaving West Point, Custer himself wrote:

"Taking the evening train for Washington, I found the cars crowded with troops, officers and men, hastening to the Capital.

"At each station we passed on the road, at which a halt was made, crowds of citizens were assembled, provided bountifully with refreshments which were distributed in the most lavish manner among the troops. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds; they received us with cheers, and cheered us in parting. It was no unusual sight on leaving a station surrounded by these loyal people, to see matrons and maidens em-

bracing and kissing with patriotic fervor the men, entire strangers to them, whom they saw hastening to the defense of the nation.

"Arriving at Washington soon after daylight, Saturday morning the 20th of July, I made my way to the Ebbitt House, where I expected to find some of my classmates domiciled. Among others whom I found there was Parker, appointed from Missouri, who had been my room- and tent-mate at West Point for years. He was one of the few members of my class who, while sympathizing with the South, had remained at the Academy long enough to graduate and secure a diploma.

"Proceeding to his room without going through the formality of sending up a card, I found him, at that early hour, still in bed. Briefly he responded to my anxious inquiry for news, that McDowell's army hourly was expected. My next inquiry was as to his future plans and intentions, remembering his Southern sympathies. To this he replied by asking me to take, from the table near by, and read, an official order to which he pointed.

"Upon opening the document referred to, I

found it to be an order from the War Department dismissing from the rolls of the army, Second Lieutenant James P. Parker, for having tendered his resignation in the face of the enemy. . . . After an hour or more spent in discussing the dark probabilities of the future as particularly affected by the clouds of the impending war, I bade a fond farewell to my former friend and classmate, with whom I had lived in closer intimacy and companionship than with any other being, he to make his way (as he did immediately) to the seat of the Confederate Government and accept a commission under a flag raised in rebellion against the Government that had educated him, and that he had sworn to defend; I to proceed to the office of the Adjutant-General of the army and report for such duty as might be assigned me. . . .

"It was not until after two o'clock in the morning that I obtained an audience with the Adjutant-General of the army, and reported to him formally for orders, as my instructions directed me to do. . . .

"Following the lead of the officer to whom I had reported, I was conducted to the room in

which General Scott received official visitors. Looking at me a moment, the General shook me cordially by the hand, saying, 'Well, my young friend, I am glad to welcome you to the service at this critical time. Our country has need of the strong arms of all her loyal sons in this emergency.' Then, turning to the Adjutant-General, he inquired to what company I had been assigned.

" 'To Company G, Second Cavalry, now under Major Innes Palmer, with General McDowell,' was the reply. Then addressing me, the General said, 'We have had the assistance of quite a number of you young men from the Academy, drilling volunteers, etc. Now, what can I do for you? Would you prefer to be ordered to report to General Mansfield to aid in this work, or is your desire for something more active?'

"Although overwhelmed by such condescension on the part of one so far superior in rank to any officer with whom I had been brought in contact, I ventured to stammer out that I earnestly desired to be ordered to at once join my company, then with General McDowell, as I

was eager to see active service. 'A very commendable resolution, young man,' was the reply 'Go and provide yourself with a horse, if possible, and call here at seven this evening. I desire to send some dispatches to General McDowell, and you can be the bearer of them.'

"It was between two and three o'clock in the morning when we [Custer and a mounted soldier] reached the army near Centerville. The men had already breakfasted, and many of the regiments had already been formed in column in the roads, ready to resume the march; but owing to delays in starting, most of the men were lying on the ground, endeavoring to catch a few minutes more of sleep; others were sitting or standing in small groups, smoking or chatting.

"So filled did I find the road with soldiers that it was with difficulty my horse could pick his way among the sleeping bodies without disturbing them. But for my companion I should have had considerable difficulty in finding my way to headquarters; but he seemed familiar with the localities even in the darkness, and soon conducted me to a group of tents near which a large

log fire was blazing, throwing out a bright light over the entire scene for some distance around. . . .

"Three days before, I had quit school at West Point; now I was about to witness the first grand struggle in open battle between the Union and the secession armies."

During this disastrous day at Bull Run, Custer and his cavalry unit had little actual fighting to do. When the battle was over, and the troops of the North had thrown away their arms and were scurrying back toward Washington, even the regulars were forced to join them. Custer's company of cavalry and a section of Arnold's battery were the last organized troops to leave the field, but the guns had to be abandoned at Cub Run, on account of the passageway being blocked by broken vehicles.

All in all it was rather a full day for a brand-new soldier. As Custer himself wrote: "I had ridden nearly all the night preceding the battle to enable me to join the army and participate in the struggle. When the battle reached its disastrous termination, and night spread its mantle over our defeated and demoralized

troops, I found myself hastening with the fleeing, frightened soldiery back towards the capital which I had left but a few hours before. To add to the discomforts and delays of the retreat, the rain fell in torrents, rendering the road almost impassable. Reaching Arlington Heights early in the forenoon of the next day, I scarcely waited for my company to be assigned to its camp before I was stretched at full length under a tree, where, from fatigue, hunger, and exhaustion, I soon fell asleep despite the rain and mud, and slept for hours without awakening. . . .”

It was war with a capital W, and Custer reveled in it. Following a few days at Arlington, the troop of the Second Cavalry to which Custer was assigned, was transferred down the Potomac to Alexandria, where it was soon placed under the command of Brigadier-General Phil Kearny. Kearny, a hard old soldier, had no aide and taking a fancy to this young West-Pointer he asked for him. An order prohibiting regular army officers from serving as aides to generals commanding volunteer troops, however, soon sent Custer back to his cavalry outfit.

Later that fall he was sent to his half-sister's home in Monroe, Michigan, on sick leave, and, returning in the winter, joined the gallant Fifth United States Cavalry, an outfit which probably furnished more high officers to both armies than any single regiment in existence. Established in 1855 by the then Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, twenty of the original officers were appointed from the regular army. Of this twenty, no less than sixteen became general officers: Robert E. Lee, Sidney Johnson, Hardee, Emory, G. H. Thomas, Van Dorn, Kirby Smith, Oakes, Innes Palmer, Stoneman, "Shanks" Evans, R. W. Johnson, Field, Gerrard, Crosby, and Hood—and in later days Fitzhugh Lee, Major McIntosh, Richard Byrnes—and, of course, Custer.

With the coming of spring, 1862, General McClellan, who had replaced the venerable General Scott as head of the army following the disaster of Bull Run, moved his great Army of the Potomac to the peninsula between the James and York rivers, where he was to attack and capture Richmond. Custer, temporarily assigned to the Engineer Corps, did balloon reconnoitering, built redoubts, drew maps, led raids against the

enemy outpost, and on his own initiative took part in the desperate engagement in which General Hancock lost 1700 Union soldiers. In his official report, General Hancock made special mention of the young West-Pointer: "Lieutenant Custer, Fifth Regular Cavalry, volunteering and leading the way on horseback."

A few days later, Custer, in company with General Barnard, the chief engineer of the army, made a risky reconnaissance on the Chickahominy in search of a good ford to be later used by the troops. Alone, Custer waded into the stream, drawn revolver held high over his head, and in actual sight of the enemy pickets crossed the stream, and returning reported to his superior. The two officers then galloped back to McClellan's headquarters and while Custer stepped back General Barnard made his report.

"Where is this young officer who did this?" McClellan demanded.

Barnard motioned for the wet, muddy, and disheveled Custer to approach and face the great "Little Mac." "Tell me just what you found when you crossed the river," McClellan quietly asked him. In a moment Custer was eagerly reciting what he had observed, ending with a

request that he be allowed to take a company or two and capture a picket post on the enemy side of the river. Then, conscious that he had talked more than was absolutely necessary, he stopped abruptly.

"Mr. Custer, you are just the sort of young man I have been looking for," General McClellan finally broke the silence. "How would you like to serve on my staff?"

Custer could only stammer out his thanks and acceptance. Almost at once he was promoted to a captaincy and became a devoted follower of the unfortunate McClellan. A few months later, when the general's campaign had failed miserably and he had been removed, Custer suffered his only eclipse of the whole war. For a while, the worm of bitterness and misunderstanding which began to gnaw at McClellan's heart, deeply bored into Custer's as well. McClellan, a "professional" Democrat, largely blamed his difference in politics for the action of President Lincoln and the Republican administration in removing him, and young Custer, of the same political faith as his idol, shared in this unwarranted belief.

To the boy soldier, in those stirring days in front of Richmond, McClellan was the Knight Commander, for whom he was only too anxious to do and to die. As a fighting aide he wandered up and down the lines, eager to take part in any engagement and always ready to join in a sortie into the enemy positions. In a letter under date of August 18, 1862, he describes with great gusto one of these mad dashes whose object was to cut off a regiment of rebel cavalry:

"During the chase I became separated from all the command except Lieutenant Byrnes, of my regiment, and about ten men, and started out again. We had not gone far until we saw an officer and fifteen or twenty men riding towards us with the intention of cutting their way through and joining their main body. When they saw us coming towards them, however, they suddenly wheeled to the left, and attempted to gallop around us. Byrnes called out, 'Custer, you take the right hand and I will take the left hand,' which we did, and then followed the most exciting sport I ever engaged in.

"My pistol was fresh loaded. I recognized the rebel officer by his uniform. He rode in front

of his men and was mounted on a splendid horse. I selected him as my game, and gave my black the spur and rein. If I had been compelled to follow behind him I could never have overtaken him, but instead of doing so, I turned off with the intention of heading him off. By this means I came very close to him. I could have fired at him then, but seeing a stout rail fence in front of him, I concluded to try him at it. I reasoned that he might attempt to leap it and be thrown, or if he could clear it so could I.

"The chase was now exciting in the extreme. I saw as he neared the fence that he was preparing for a leap, and what was more, I soon saw that the confidence that he had in his horse was not misplaced; he cleared the fence handsomely. Now came my turn. I saw him look around just as I reached the fence, but he certainly derived no satisfaction by so doing, as my black seemed determined not to be outdone by the rebel, and cleared the fence as well as I could wish. . . .

"By avoiding some soft ground which I saw was retarding him, I was enabled to get close upon him when I called upon him to surrender

or I would shoot him. He paid no attention and I fired, taking as good an aim as was possible on horseback. If I struck him he gave no indication of it, he pushed on. I again called on him to surrender, but received no reply. I took deliberate aim at his body and fired. He sat for a moment in his saddle, reeled and fell to the ground, his horse ran on and mine also. I stopped as soon as possible, but by this time Byrnes and his party were around me firing right and left. I joined with them and captured another rebel who had leaped from his horse and endeavored to escape in the woods.

"We were now some distance from the main body; the Colonel became alarmed for our safety and caused the bugler to sound the 'rally' when we were compelled to join the main body. Before the 'rally' was sounded, however, I saw the horse of the officer I had shot but a short distance from me. I recognized him by a red morocco breast strap which I had noticed during the chase. Four other riderless horses were with him. I rode up to them and, selecting him from the rest, led him off, while the others were taken possession of by others of my party. He

is a blooded horse, as is evident by his appearance. I have him yet and intend to keep him. The saddle, which I also retained, is a splendid one, covered with black morocco and ornamented with silver nails. The sword of the officer was fastened to the saddle, so that altogether it was a pleasant trophy.

"Owing to the confusion and excitement of such an occurrence I was not able to see the officer after he fell from his horse, but Lieutenant Byrnes told me that he saw him after he fell and that he rose to his feet, turned around, threw up his hands and fell to the ground with a stream of blood rushing from his mouth. I had either hit him in the neck or body; in either case the wound must have been mortal. It was his own fault, I told him twice to surrender, but was compelled to shoot him. . . . My horse is a perfect beauty, a bright bay, and as fleet as a deer. . . ."

This horse he named Don Juan and many times rode in battle. The sword he wore until his death. It was a long, straight Toledo blade and bore the Spanish inscription: "*No mi tirez sin razón; no mē envainez sin honra—*

Draw me not without cause; sheathe me not without honor."

Great days these for the young captain. With the campaign over, and his beloved chief in temporary retirement, Custer was put on leave and repaired to Monroe, Michigan, on a long visit to his half-sister with whom he had lived as a child.

The winter before, a gay and dashing young cavalry blade, he had spent his winter leave at her home and had given the good citizens of Monroe plenty to talk about for the rest of the season. Until the war, Custer had bothered very little with liquor, but in the long, uneasy weeks around Washington, following the battle of Bull Run, he had played the part of the typical young subaltern of the period, and now on leave, he proceeded to enliven the peaceful and drab little village of Monroe.

Then one afternoon, when he returned in broad daylight from a rip-roaring party, his half-sister cornered him in his own room, and before she left, Custer had pledged himself never to take another drink. During all the rest of his life he kept to the full letter of his pledge, and except for short and diplomatic puffs at foul and

distasteful Indian pipes of peace, he never smoked.

It was while on this second leave that Custer stepped boldly from the romance of war into the romance of love. The lovely young daughter of Judge Bacon, Monroe's most prominent citizen, caught his eye, and except for the judge's objections, he would have pressed his suit with the same dash and ardor that he showed on the battle-field. The idea of his beautiful and only daughter marrying an impecunious young captain did not particularly thrill the judge, and when later in the winter Custer returned to field duty, he was about as love-sick a young swain as the entire Army of the Potomac could produce.

Joining General Pleasonton's staff, he took part in several engagements and then, in the middle of June, found himself hot in the battle of Aldie, fighting against the indomitable "Jeb" Stuart and his Confederate cavalry. Checked, and on the verge of rout, Colonel Kilpatrick, the brigade commander, and Colonel Douty of the First Maine Cavalry, dashed to the front, calling for the men to charge. Custer coming up at the

moment needed no special invitation. Galloping to the very lead he called on the troopers to follow him, and led the terrific charge. Kilpatrick, a moment later went down, his horse shot under him. Douty fell mortally wounded, but "Lucky" Custer charged on, and the day was won. A hundred prisoners and one battle flag were captured.

The following day Custer was recommended for promotion to the rank of brigadier-general. He had won his star.

A brigadier-general at twenty-three, the youngest in the Union Army! A general with curls that touched his shoulders; a boy with hardly his full growth.

One year before he had applied unsuccessfully to the governor of Michigan for the colonelcy of a Michigan Cavalry regiment. Now the whole Michigan Cavalry Brigade of four regiments was to be his. Immediately he was ordered to join it and take command.

A kid general over bronzed volunteer colonels old enough to be his father! It was preposterous!

"Damn it all! We won't stand for such an

insult," the old colonels swore to each other. "Who is this new 'general' we are to have? Did you say he was that Custer brat from Monroe? We'll run him out soon enough! They tell me he has curls. Bah!"

But Custer, with his long blond curls, was barely started. Before he reported to take over his new command, he concocted a uniform that was for a time the stock joke of the army—but only for a time. The coat was a short affair made of black velvet, and the trousers, stuck in great cavalry boots, was of the same fantastic material. In place of the ordinary shoulder-straps denoting his rank, Custer invented gold-lace chevrons that ran along his sleeves from his wrists to his elbows. He added a wide-brimmed hat that he had taken from a captured Confederate officer, a navy-blue shirt with a broad collar adorned with gold stars, and to top it all off, a wide, flowing scarlet necktie.

Not only was he going to be the youngest and most dashing cavalry general in the entire army, but he was going to be the most prominent and picturesque one. He was going to be seen and heard; he was going to make his men know him.

So it was that this fearless and swashbuckling boy general rode into his Michigan brigade and asked for headquarters. He had no staff, no friends, no standing.

He called the colonels together. They came grouching and ill-tempered.

"Gentlemen, I propose to make this Michigan brigade the finest fighting cavalry brigade in the entire army," he began as gruffly as his years would permit. "I want discipline to be tightened and I want all this foolishness that volunteer outfits are famous for ended this moment. . . . I want an officer at every formation, including stable-call and reveille. I want every man in this command to salute properly and respectfully. I want officers' baggage to be curtailed and I want every regiment in this outfit to be spick and span and smart. . . . That will do, gentlemen."

Swearing under their breath, the officers filed out of the young general's tent.

"Damn whippersnapper from West Point," they snarled. "Giving us a boy to lead us, when tomorrow the very Union may be lost! Great God! What fools our generals are!"

That night there was little sleep for the Army of the Potomac. Lee the Invincible—Lee the Ever-Victorious—had crossed the Pennsylvania border and was actually invading the North. Washington was threatened. The whole North was trembling with fear. Again and again, hopes revived, great armies had been built up, and sent against Lee and his indomitable Army of Northern Virginia—and again and again the Union armies had been defeated and their general superseded.

And now at the last hour, with Lee making his great thrust into the heart of the North, Meade had suddenly been given this Army of the Potomac and ordered to fight Lee.

"What's the use? Bobby Lee will only lick us again," ten thousand blue-clad soldiers murmured that last night of June.

In the Michigan Cavalry Brigade they not only faced the dismal fact that a new commanding general had been thrown into the fearful situation, but they themselves had to accept a twenty-three-year-old dude general, who wore long curls and a velvet suit. Within forty-eight hours it would be all over, the Union armies

would again be defeated. Only this time it might be the end itself—Lee was actually on Northern soil, and a victory now might win him Washington and the war.

Thousands of Northern men had fought and died, while their leaders had floundered and wallowed in indecision, bad generalship, and almost treasonable incompetency. Only the idealism and high courage of Lincoln and the plain people of the North, both in and out of the army, had given them the steel and blood to withstand defeat after defeat at the hands of the great Lee.

That last day of June, 1863, when Custer rode in to take over his brigade, he knew that the days to follow were pregnant with awful possibilities. The very life of the Union hung on the slender chance that Meade could defeat Lee, and barring Antietam, Lee had never been defeated.

On July 1, the great battle of Gettysburg opened. The Third Cavalry Division under Kilpatrick, with Custer's Michigan Brigade in advance, moved towards the epic battle-field. Suddenly, Wade Hampton's Confederate cavalry attacked Kilpatrick in the rear. Custer,

swinging his brigade about face, galloped to the sound of the guns. Quickly and surely, he ordered his four regiments into position. Hampton's cavalry retired. There was little fighting for Custer that day—but his disgruntled officers and men saw that he knew his business.

That night word drifted in that the Union army had suffered terrible losses and had retired from their early position to high ground near the village of Gettysburg. The next day would tell the story.

"We can lick Lee—if we don't lose our nerve," Custer told his officers. They only shook their heads in grave doubt.

That day of July 2, the Confederate infantry charged stubbornly against the entrenched Yankees on Cemetery Ridge and were repulsed. Way off on the right flank of the Union army, Custer led a spirited saber charge of the Sixth Michigan, but it was of no great importance.

Both armies were tightening their belts for the terrible and immortal test that was to come the following day. If Lee could break through, the Confederate States could write their own victorious terms in Northern territory. It was



The Michiganders moved forward to meet the oncoming attack.

the high moment of the war. For the first time, Union troops were fighting on their own sacred soil.

At an early hour, Custer's division commander, General Kilpatrick of the Third Division, ordered him to move his four regiments on the road from Two Taverns to Gettysburg. With column formed, Custer started to carry out his orders.

Suddenly came the word that the flower of the Confederate cavalry—under the plumed knights of the South, the great "Jeb" Stuart and his dashing lieutenants, Wade Hampton and Fitzhugh Lee—were preparing to charge the Union right, break through and capture Meade's ammunition train and cut off his reserves.

Desperate and determined, the clear-thinking Robert E. Lee had started Stuart to drive into the Federal right, while Pickett's men went to death and eternal fame in the Union center.

It was a brilliant attempt, and if Stuart succeeded in breaking through, the tide of battle might be turned and engulf the Union forces.

General Gregg, fine soldier that he was, sensed the grave danger, and without authority ordered

Custer and his brigade, belonging to another division, to hold their position on the extreme right of the Union line, on the pike leading from Hanover to Gettysburg.

Custer needed no additional invitation. Throwing his men across the path of the dauntless Stuart, he prepared to defend himself in the best cavalry tradition—by a mounted charge.

Drawing his long saber, he galloped to the front of his Seventh Michigan, a new and untried regiment.

"Come on, you Wolverines!" he shouted and led off.

At a high stone fence, behind which the gray troopers were posted, the charging horses of the blue-clad soldiers piled up in the wildest confusion. In a minute the line had broken, and the Seventh was forced to retire.

Meanwhile, Custer's artillery, the famous Pennington Battery of regulars, poured so deadly and accurate a fire into Grimes's guns that they were put out of action. Still Stuart's brave men came on.

Custer now rode up to the experienced First Michigan and called for the men to follow him.

With sabers gleaming in the sunlight and cheers breaking from their lips, the Michiganders moved forward to meet the oncoming attack; first at a trot and then at a gallop, they hurled themselves at the gray line. For a moment it held fast. Steel struck steel. Then from the very fury of the attack the Southern men were seen to yield, then give way completely, and retreat back into the sheltering woods.

Over to the left in the Union center, Pickett's great charge had failed. Here on the far-flung Union right, Custer had swept back the desperate attack of Stuart, and helped to save the day.

The impossible had happened—Lee had been whipped. The invasion of the North was over. Washington was saved. The magic of Lee's name was broken forever. Never again was he "Lee the Invincible"—"Lee the Ever-Victorious."

Up to this day, Jeb Stuart and his Confederate cavalry, too, had been invincible. But this third day of July, 1863, Custer the boy general, had defeated him, and never again was the name of Jeb Stuart to be uttered with fear and trembling by Northern cavalrymen.

That day Custer had led a matchless cavalry charge, and the exalted and battle-mad Michigan cavalymen pointed to the boyish figure with scarlet tie and golden curls tossing in the breeze, and cheered. Two horses had been shot from under him, and he had showed his superb courage and leadership.

He was *their* general now—their hero. They were eager to fight and die for him. They bought bolts of red cloth and made flowing ties for themselves. They let their hair grow long, and prayed for the flashing curls of their chief.

They had found a leader to follow, and love, and grumble over. They spread his fame throughout the whole army. "A wild boy named Custer!" They made him famous.

What if he was a bit of a showman, a swash-buckler with a flair for publicity and the public eye? He was their boy general—Custer the Gal-lant—Custer the Fighter.

And this boy of twenty-three reveled in it all. The papers wrote him up, old generals slapped him on the back and were proud of him. Almost overnight he became all but a legendary figure. Michigan adopted him as her own.

Late in the fall, he visited his half-sister up in Monroe, and when he left, he brought back to headquarters in the Michigan Brigade, the belle of Monroe.

A year later, with brilliant victories to his credit, he was made a major-general by Sheridan, who gave him the Third Cavalry Division. He had gone beyond his own most daring dreams.

A major-general with twelve regiments under his command at twenty-five! The *beau sabreur* of Sheridan's irresistible cavalry!

He was a truly great cavalryman now—a flaming leader, who knew when to strike, when to hold on, when to give ground.

The Third Cavalry Division followed his old Michigan Brigade in adopting his red scarf as its badge. Adding to its already distinguished record, its boy general led it to more and more honors; through the great Shenandoah campaign, Woodstock Races, Winchester (where Sheridan said, "I take no praise for myself, it all belongs to my two boys, Merritt and Custer"); Cedar Creek, where he badly defeated his class-mate General Rosser; on to Sheridan's last raid before the gates of Richmond, and then the nine

sleepless days and nights from Five Forks to Appomattox and Lee's surrender.

In the annals of war, there is no more moving record of arms than these last nine fighting days of Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia. For four long and bloody years, they had fought the good fight for the South. They had won many victories; they had defeated many armies and many generals. They believed their cause a holy one, and they had vowed they would fight until there was no one left who could hold a musket. And now they were trapped, overwhelmed by superior numbers and, for the moment, by a higher spirit.

For four years, the North had carried the war into their lands, despite the fact that a score of times it had been discouraged by defeat, and weakened by the disloyal and faint-hearted elements within its own borders. Men of softer metal would have called for peace years before—but not such men as Lincoln and Grant. Ceaselessly, eternally, they had carried the war on and on, and now on this first day of April, 1865, victory was almost at hand.

At Richmond and Petersburg, some twenty

miles to the south, Lee had 52,000 Confederates. Surrounding him on three sides, Grant had 116,000 Union soldiers. Off to the south, toward Raleigh, Joe Johnston's Confederate army faced Sherman's Union troops. If Lee could extricate his army from Richmond and join Johnston it might take another year of hard fighting before the North could end the war.

Doggedly and desperately, Lee started his withdrawal from Richmond toward the southwest. On his flank to the south clung Sheridan's Union cavalry, with Custer's division as the spear-head.

For nine heartbreaking days, Lee fought back and gave way, fought back and gave way. Night and day, Custer and the rest of Sheridan's men galloped on his flank, threw themselves on his retreating trains, checked, captured, battled his disheartened troops. Remorselessly, incessantly, they kept pounding away, cutting in on the front, blocking his retreat to the south, stabbing his flank. Night and day, Sheridan, and Custer, and Merritt, and Gregg, and the others fought and checkmated him at every turn.

Lee's 52,000 dwindled to 37,000, and then to

28,000. On the afternoon of April 7, Grant forwarded to Lee a note requesting the surrender of his forces in order to save useless slaughter. Lee replied, asking for terms. April 8, the generals again exchanged notes, and on the following day Lee accepted Grant's stipulation that they should not discuss general terms of peace but only the surrender of Lee's army.

Despite the approaching overtures, Lee's army was constantly endeavoring to break through the Union left flank, and on the morning of April 9, General Gordon, a Confederate corps commander, attacked with desperate determination. Custer and Gregg of Sheridan's cavalry held the advance position, and as they were driven back, they opened up on each side of a wood; and now a long line of hidden blue infantrymen stepped forward into a charge. It was too much for the weakened, disheartened, and hungry Confederates, and they were driven back to position in front of Appomattox Court-House.

Custer formed his division to charge, and his troopers were moving down the slope toward the exhausted enemy, when a staff officer rode out from the gray lines with a white towel tied



General Custer galloped forward and received the flag of surrender.

to a stick. Custer, on the advance line of his troops, galloped forward and with his own hands received the flag of surrender.

It was the end. The bitter and awful war was over. Custer and a million other tired soldiers could now go home to their wives and sweethearts.

That night, Custer addressed a farewell to his magnificent Third Division:

"The record established by your indomitable courage is unparalleled in the annals of war," he said. "Your prowess has won for you even the respect and admiration of your enemies. During the past six months, although in most cases confronted by superior numbers, you have captured from the enemy, in open battle, 111 pieces of field artillery, sixty-five battle flags and upwards of 10,000 prisoners of war including seven general officers. Within the past ten days, and included in the above, you have captured forty-six field-pieces of artillery, and thirty-seven battle flags.

"You have never lost a gun, never lost a color, and you have never been defeated; and notwithstanding the numerous engagements in which

you have borne a prominent part, including those memorable battles of the Shenandoah, you have captured every piece of artillery which the enemy has dared to open upon you. . . .

"And now, speaking for myself alone, when the war is ended and the task of the historian begins, when these deeds of daring, which have rendered the name and fame of the Third Cavalry Division imperishable, are inscribed upon the bright pages of our country's history, I only ask that my name be written as that of the Commander of the Third Cavalry Division."

To the millions of plain Americans, he is remembered not as the commander of a dashing and victorious division of cavalry that captured ten thousand prisoners and sixty-five battle flags from a gallant and stubborn foe, but as an Indian-fighter who with a handful of troopers, eleven years later, galloped to a tragic death.

He had fought Lee and Stonewall Jackson, Jeb Stuart and "the gallant Pelham"—great and remembered soldiers—but it was the naked Sioux warriors of the plains who sent him to deathless fame. The gods of battle have their own inscrutable way of making heroes.

CHAPTER FOUR

SIX weeks after Lee's flag of surrender was brought to Custer that bright April day in 1865 at Appomattox Court-House, the boy cavalry general was on his way to Texas.

There was still fighting to be done down there. Kirby Smith had not surrendered, and an accounting had to be made of the romantic but stupid invasion of Mexico by Maximilian, while the Federal Government had been too busy with its own Civil War to enforce its Monroe Doctrine.

Now, with a million trained soldiers under arms, there was to be no more foolishness—nor was the Confederacy to be permitted to slip below the border and bolster up the tin emperor in return for a slave state.

Sheridan had already hurried southward, and on the very evening of the great parade in Washington, Custer, with his lovely young wife and his clattering, clanking staff, took the train for Louisville, where they boarded a river packet

for New Orleans. Kirby Smith had, in the meantime, surrendered, but there was still plenty of work to be done.

At New Orleans he received his instructions from Sheridan, and at Alexandria, Louisiana, found his division of cavalry—a discontented, disorganized and undisciplined gang of volunteers who, now that the war was over, wanted to go home. As soon as he could whip them into some sort of shape, he started the long and dusty march across Texas to Austin, Mrs. Custer riding by his side at the head of the column.

Custer, accustomed to a smart, loyal outfit, with an *esprit de corps* welded in the furnace of war, fumed and fussed and went half-mad with worry over this tough rabble that wanted to do a little looting and then go north.

"I'll stop desertion and discipline these soldiers if I have to punish every man in the division," he swore to his staff. "Next time you catch a deserter, shave his head and publicly flog him."

But even this did not stop the endless string of men who slipped off at night and headed north. With one battle-charge to lead, he could have made these soldiers love him, but he had no

brave deed to fall back on. However, with the men once on the march, and thrilled with the promise of a campaign below the border in Mexico, little by little a better spirit developed, and by the time the column reached Austin it was well in hand.

But the Mexican war did not come—and then in the late spring, one year after Custer had made his last charge on the Virginia battle-fields, his division was disbanded; and without parachute he made the tremendous drop from major-general of volunteers to a lowly captain of the Fifth Cavalry, temporarily on detached service. From \$8,000 a year, with a great staff, gold lace and glory, he slid overnight to \$2,000 a year, and an even chance at obscurity.

Uncertain as to his future, he caught the train for his wife's home at Monroe, Michigan. Michigan was proud of him—he had led their own cavalry brigade to deathless fame. He could have anything they had, even if he was a Democrat.

"We'll run you for congress, general," friends declared to him.

"If you want to settle down in Michigan,

we'll find a good opening for you," others proposed.

The young general shook his curls in negative answer. He was a soldier. What he wanted was another war.

"Let's go to Washington and see about this Mexican business," he said to his wife. "If I could secure a long leave of absence I might get a high command in the Mexican national army and help thrash Maximilian. That would be great fun."

"Your husband is a born soldier—never stand in the way of his profession," Mrs. Custer's wise father had told her, so she packed her trunk and went along.

Custer knew what he was doing; he had met too many Mexican agents on the border, and was too close to Sheridan, not to know his own peculiar value to the discouraged and disheartened troops of Juarez. Within a few days, he was offered double the pay of an American major-general—in gold—and the rank of inspector-general of cavalry in the Mexican army. All that he had to do was to bring with him one or two thousand American soldiers. With his

personal popularity, he could have raised five times that number in a fortnight.

And what could be better than this—a rollicking, romantic war in a comic-opera land, with himself playing the lead of the gallant soldier of fortune—and paid in good gold coin?

He hurried to the war department and saw Grant, the commanding general of the army, and the most popular man in the North. Grant was won over, and wrote a letter of recommendation to Señor Romero, the Mexican minister:

HEADQUARTERS ARMIES OF THE U. S.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

May 16, 1866.

DEAR SIR: This will introduce to your acquaintance, General Custer, who rendered such distinguished service as a cavalry officer during the war. There was no officer in that branch of the service who had the confidence of Gen. Sheridan to a greater extent than Gen. Custer, and there is no officer in whose judgment I had greater faith than in Sheridan's. Please understand that I mean by this to endorse General Custer in high degree.

General Custer proposes to apply for a leave of absence for one year, with permission to leave this country, and to take service while abroad. I propose to endorse his application favorably and believe that he will get it.

Yours truly

U. S. GRANT

To Sr. M. Romero, Minister, etc.

But the square-jawed Grant guessed wrong for once; the war department refused to give Custer his leave. There was enough worry over Mexico—past, present, and future—without having this hard-fighting boy hero of the newspapers mixed up in it as a soldier of fortune. If he wanted to go he would have to resign completely and finally from the army.

Custer, crestfallen and disconsolate, went back to Monroe. He had been used to getting what he wanted, and it hurt his pride to be turned down so brusklly. President Johnson—the poor weakling who followed the great Lincoln—was to speak at Buffalo.

“Libby, we’ll go to Buffalo and plead with the President,” young Custer announced to his wife.

And the loyal young lady, remembering again her father's injunction, nodded her approval.

But instead of Johnson's giving his consent for Custer to gallop off to this Mexican brawl, he calmly ordered the gay hero and his charming wife to join the presidential party and "swing around the circuit" with him. Even if they had wanted to, they could not have refused—but what young couple would not have been flattered by such presidential favor?

Custer was still only a smiling boy of twenty-seven, a darling of the gods, a pet of the crowd. It was all a joy-ride to him. . . . The fact that he was a Democrat, as was Johnson, and that the President was daily losing favor, meant nothing to this young soldier. But before the trip was finished, he discovered that all this had hurt greatly his own popularity.

And, what was more, he had failed to persuade Johnson to permit him to go to Mexico.

But here at home was something far more thrilling than even fighting in Mexico. The Indians were on the war-path again.

From far out in the romantic West—out beyond the broad Mississippi—up and down the

Republican, the Platte, the Smoky, the Arkansas, the Cimarron—high up the wild Missouri, the Yellowstone, Powder River and the Big-horn—came the throbbing of their war drums.

Like a breath of new life to Custer came his commission as a lieutenant colonel in the new Seventh Cavalry, and an order to report in the West—the West of romance and adventure.

Indians—pioneers—fur-traders—gold—new lands—overland trails—hostile attacks! It was the last great frontier.

The slow, creaking covered wagons were heading westward. They were going to the gold fields—to “Pike’s Peak or bust”—to Last Chance Gulch, to Virginia City—a thousand, two thousand miles westward—ever westward!

Free lands, rich free farm lands of Oregon and California, of Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Colorado, were calling men. Bearded men whose hearts were fired by the fantastic teaching of one Brigham Young were trekking across the plains and mountain passes to Utah and the Mormon colonies. Nesters, hated but unafraid, were slipping into the broad, unfenced Texas cattle ranges. Railroads were pushing their long arms

of steel westward across forbidden Indian grounds.

Buffalo killers were slaughtering the noble bison by the millions. Every smart sleigh must have its robe; and any young gallant who could not sport a buffalo coat was as unfashionable as a college boy without a coonskin is today.

For a period of thirty years, from 1830 to the beginning of the Civil War, there had been very little real difficulty with the Plains Indians—the Sioux, Cheyennes, Comanches, Arapahoes, Kiowa and Apaches. The great buffalo lands of the high plains, running fifteen hundred miles north and south, and one thousand miles east and west, had been given them so that here, forever undisturbed, they might live their own happy, primitive life. For years the white men did not want any part of this territory. There were still millions of acres of free lands in the middle states, and the restless energy of the pioneer race had plenty of work to occupy it nearer at hand.

In 1841, the first covered wagons snaked out a long, dusty trail from the Missouri, up the Platte, across the Rockies to Oregon. More followed—and then in 1849 the trails along the

highroads that led to the California gold fields were marked with the bleached bones of men and oxen.

With the first stampede over, whiskered old miners, driving ahead their burros, spread out over the vast reaches of the Rockies, dreaming, searching, digging for gold. Ten years after the first great rush, word flashed over the world that the country around Pike's Peak was paved with gold, and a new mad rush started. One hundred and fifty thousand trekked across the Indian lands, killing Indian game, quarreling and fighting with the red men, trading whisky for their furs and ponies, spreading hate and fear, and a dull sense that their free Indian days were numbered.

Farther north, the foot-hill country of western Montana, Virginia City, Bozeman, Last Chance Gulch and a score of other places, gave up their gold and silver, and drew their quota of grizzled miners, gamblers and dance-hall girls. A road was needed to lead from eastern civilization to these squatters in the foothills. Solemn Indian treaties and pledges guaranteed that no roads would be built across this northern Indian

hunting ground, but white men were calling, and white men must be served.

Both sides were cruel and bitter. On November 27, 1864, J. H. Chivington, colonel of the First Colorado Cavalry, attacked and slaughtered a helpless Indian camp. In the words of the official report of the Peace Commission of 1868: "It scarcely has its parallel in the records of barbarity. Fleeing women holding up their hands and praying for mercy were shot down; infants were killed and scalped in derision; men were tortured and mutilated in a manner that would put to shame the savages of interior Africa. No one will be astonished that a war ensued which cost the government \$30,000,000 and carried conflagration and death into the border settlements."

In the spring of 1866, General Carrington marched north from Fort Laramie to build three forts along the Bozeman trail leading up through eastern Wyoming to Montana, and then westward to the mining camps. The Indians, well within their treaty rights, resisted with all the force they were capable of.

The day before Christmas, 1866, a telegram

was received at Fort Riley that shocked Custer and every soldier in the command.

Colonel Fetterman, a soldier of the Civil War and known personally by a number of the officers of Custer's Seventh Cavalry, had been ambushed with ninety-one men and two officers, at Fort Kearney on the Powder River, not far from the present town of Sheridan, Wyoming; and every man and officer in the command killed by Indians under Chief Red Cloud. Civilian wood-cutters, working under contract to supply wood to the newly erected fort, had signaled that they were being attacked by a large body of Indians. Colonel Fetterman volunteered to take out the relief expedition. Eagerly they had followed the Indians into a trap, and there within a few minutes every soldier of the party had been killed and scalped.

"Only six men of the whole command," Custer wrote in his "Life on the Plains," "were killed by balls; and two of these, Colonel Fetterman and Captain Brown, no doubt inflicted this death upon themselves—or each other—for both were shot through the left temple, and powder was burned into the skin and flesh about the

wounds. These officers had often asserted that they would never be taken alive by Indians."

To an officer of Custer's temperament, such annihilation of an army command came almost as a personal challenge. He felt that only by force, unstinted force, could the Indian outrages against the whites be stopped; but he was fair enough to see that the Indian was being overwhelmed by the remorseless march of progress, and that his old free life was being taken away from him forever.

"If I were an Indian," he wrote, "I often think I would greatly prefer to cast my lot among those of my own people who adhered to the free open plains, rather than submit to the confined limits of a reservation, there to be the recipient of the blessed benefits of civilization, with its vices thrown in without stint or measure."

Before he had been long in the West, he saw that the red man was the victim of a vicious circle that was closing in on him and choking out his very life. The settlers, the railroads, the pioneers, the cattlemen demanded more and more land that belonged to the Indians. To get this land, the government brought the Indians

into peace councils, where they bribed them with presents and promises until they would sign away their rights. Then, forced to their reservations, more often than not they were cheated out of their annuities, their rations and clothing, by an unscrupulous Indian agent.

Dissatisfied and angry, the young bloods would go on the war-path, and kill and plunder. This would bring out the army, which would stamp out the uprising by force, and drive the Indians back to their reservations, where in turn they would be cheated and debased by the white men, until they would rise up again, only to be shot down by soldiers. It was a vicious, cruel circle that was swiftly and surely exterminating all the best and bravest of the Indians.

CHAPTER FIVE

ON July 28, 1866, Custer received his commission as lieutenant colonel of the newly authorized Seventh Cavalry, and was ordered to report to Fort Riley where it was being organized. That summer of 1866, a new army bill had been passed, doubling the size of the regular army and adding, among other units, five cavalry regiments to the regular establishment. One of these was the Seventh Cavalry, with Brevet Major-General A. J. Smith, a fine old soldier who had been in the service since 1838, as its commanding officer. Custer had been offered the colonelcy of the new Ninth Cavalry, a Negro regiment, but the fact that colored outfits were not held in such high esteem immediately after the war as they were later, caused him to prefer a lieutenant-colonelcy in a white regiment.

Custer was happy. He was going into the untamed West where there would be plenty of active service, and if "Custer luck" held out, he would, to all intent and purpose, have a regiment of his own.

"Custer luck" did hold out—with the aid of his old commander Sheridan—and when he arrived at Fort Riley, the rail-head of the Kansas-Pacific Railroad, and one of the toughest towns in Christendom, he found that General Smith had been appointed commander of the local military district and stationed at Fort Harker, and that the important task of forming the brand-new regiment was his.

It was a real job. A number of the officers were older men than himself, and with one or two exceptions every one of them had seen years of active Civil War service. However, most of them had been in volunteer outfits, and they were unaccustomed to such hard and fast discipline as Custer thought necessary.

Almost immediately certain elements in the officer personnel turned against him. They were tough old soldiers, hard fighters and hard drinkers, and they asked no favors of any man—nor gave any. They did not like this boy colonel with the long curls and the "Custer luck," and they made no bones of their dislike. Some of this feeling lasted until the very hour of his death, and had more than a little to do with the

tragic lack of loyal cooperation that was so costly that day, ten years later, when the Seventh faced the supreme test on the hills along the Little Big-horn, almost a thousand miles to the north in Montana.

But if the officers presented difficult problems for Custer, the proposition of building a real regiment out of the rag-tag and bobtail mob of enlisted men sent on from the main cavalry depot at Carlisle, Pennsylvania (later to be turned into the famous Carlisle Indian School) was so formidable that everything else sunk into the shadows. The majority of the recruits had been in the Civil War, veterans both of the Union and Confederate armies. They knew all the old-soldier dodges to escape duty. They were wise in the ways of army life.

Hundreds of them enlisted and asked for duty to the new Seventh, because it was stationed in the then Far West and would give them free transportation into the gold fields and adventure. They would enlist in the "States," be sent to Carlisle, and then shipped on to Fort Riley, Kansas. With the coming of summer they would desert, and go on west to the mines.

Others, already in the western country, would enlist when the winter blasts began to blow over the high barren plains—"snow birds" they called them—and then in spring they would desert. One staff officer, making an inspection for the district commander at St. Louis, reported that during the five years of Kansas service of the Seventh Cavalry enough men had deserted from this one regiment to have filled the ranks of a full cavalry division during the Civil War.

Early in March, 1867, the Seventh Cavalry, mounted, equipped and whipped into military shape, rode out of Fort Riley with Custer at its head. As part of a military column under General Hancock, it was to begin its first campaign against the Indians. After a long winter of preparation, Custer was to have the active service that he had been longing for.

Marching overland to Fort Harker and relinquishing its supplies, the column on April 3 moved seventy miles southeast to Fort Larned, in the hope of impressing the Cheyennes that they must get back to their reservation in western Indian territory. If they could be persuaded to go back peacefully—to the broken pledges,

half rations and bad whisky of the reservations—all well and good; if they would not go peacefully, they were to be attacked and killed off. But before our young soldier and his superiors could do anything with the hostiles, they must first catch them, and this was as hard to do as it had been to try to round up Jeb Stuart or General Forrest.

After General Hancock had floundered and mused around for some weeks, with no more game in his bags than a deserted Indian village, Custer with his cavalry was finally ordered on an independent scout to the north, which would cover a thousand miles of riding.

For once the swift-moving young cavalry leader was completely stumped. The Indians could move faster than he could. His supply train from Fort Wallace was attacked and saved from complete annihilation only by the arrival of troops. Ten men under Lieutenant Kidder, sent with dispatches for him from General Sheridan, were overwhelmed and killed.

His supplies ran out, and his troopers faced death from scurvy and cholera. It was two hundred miles to the railroad, and Custer decided

that the only thing to do to save his command from starvation and death was to push a force through to Fort Harker and bring back a wagon train with food and medical supplies. Taking one hundred of the best mounted men under Captain Hamilton, he left the stockade of Fort Wallace on July 15, and pushed rapidly 150 miles to Fort Hays, making the ride in fifty-five hours. Then figuring he could push even faster with fewer men, he took his brother Tom and a handful of cavalymen and set out at once for Fort Harker and the railroad. This last sixty miles he made in twelve hours, arriving at two o'clock in the morning.

After reporting to General Smith, district commander and the detached colonel of the Seventh, Custer, first telegraphing for his supplies, took the train for Fort Riley, ninety miles to the east. He wanted to see his wife. He was only twenty-eight and very much in love.

A few weeks later, with the so-called "campaign" ended, Custer was tried by general court martial for leaving Fort Wallace and making the journey to Fort Harker and Fort Riley without permission, "on private business"; for marching



GENERAL AND MRS. CUSTER

his men excessively, and for allowing two of them to be killed and permitting several horses to be lost; and for excessive cruelty in stopping desertions while in the field. (Forty men had deserted during one night on the Platte, and a few days later, while the command was halted at noon, seven mounted and six unmounted men had been observed moving rapidly away from the camp. Major Elliott, Captain Tom Custer—the general's brother—and one or two other mounted officers had been ordered by Custer to bring them back "dead or alive." The men on horseback had succeeded in getting away, but the others had been overtaken, and when they had shown signs of fight, two or three had been killed and the others brought back under arrest.)

The charges against Custer were brought by several anti-Custer officers, under the leadership of a disgruntled captain, who within six months was dismissed from the army for drunkenness. But Custer had doubtless departed from instructions in pursuing his march, and the court convicted him and sentenced him to suspension of rank and pay for one year. Envy and hate had got in their deadly work.

The first Indian campaign of the most brilliant young cavalryman in Sheridan's army had ended in a fizzle. Red tape, official jealousy, "the Indian ring" and his own inexperience in Indian-fighting had forced him for the first time in his life to come a cropper.

"Never mind, they can't get along without you, and they'll find it out soon enough," his loyal wife declared to him.

She was right. After spending eight months of his suspension—five in Leavenworth and three in Monroe, Michigan—a telegram for the general came to Monroe. It was early evening, and he was just sitting down to dinner at a friend's house, when the messenger boy found him. Eagerly he tore open the yellow envelop and read:

HEADQUARTERS DEPT. OF THE MISSOURI
IN THE FIELD,
FORT HAYS, KANSAS,
Sept. 24, 1868.

Generals Sherman, Sully and myself, and nearly all the officers of your regiment, have asked for you, and I hope the application will be successful. Can you come at once?

Eleven companies of your regiment will move about the first of October against the hostile Indians, from Medicine Lodge Creek towards the Wichita Mountains.

P. H. SHERIDAN,
Major-General Commanding

Custer, waving the yellow slip, jumped to his feet.

"It's come," he shouted. "They've sent for me."

Making his apologies to his hostess, he hurried home and immediately started packing. What Sherman and Sheridan wanted they would get, and he didn't see any use of waiting for an official communication from Washington. The first train for the West carried the boy general, his wife, an old Negro cook, and his hounds.

He was again a bit of destiny, swept into the remorseless machine that was slowly crushing the Indians to death.

"Arriving at Fort Hays on the morning of the 30th," Custer wrote, "I found General Sheridan, who had transferred his headquarters temporarily from Fort Leavenworth to that point in

order to be nearer the field of operations. My regiment was at that time on or near the Arkansas River, in the vicinity of Fort Dodge, and about three easy marches from Fort Hays. After remaining at General Sheridan's headquarters one day and receiving instructions, I set out with a small escort across the country to Fort Dodge to assume command of my regiment.

"Arriving at Fort Dodge without incident, I found General Sully, who at that time was in command of the district in which my regiment was serving. With the exception of a few detachments, the main body of the regiment was encamped on Bluff Creek, a small tributary of the Arkansas, the camp being some thirty miles southeast from Fort Dodge. Taking with me the detachment at the Fort, I proceeded to the main camp, arriving in the afternoon."

But Indians in the neighborhood compelled the camp to move, and after some days of scouting, the command returned to Fort Dodge on the Arkansas, remaining there from October 21 to November 12. During the months that Custer had been gone from the regiment, there had been a decided lowering in the *esprit de corps*,

and Custer now determined to build this up. He at once ordered daily target practice, and picking the forty best shots in the regiment formed a sharpshooters corps under the command of Lieutenant Cook, who later, while serving as regimental-adjutant, was to be killed with Custer in his last fight on the Little Bighorn.

Hundreds of fresh remount horses had been received, and Custer saw that by selecting horses of the same color a much needed troop pride could be fostered. Ordering every horse in the regiment put on picket-line, he had the mounts arranged according to color, making four troops of bays, three of sorrels, one each of blacks, browns, and grays, with enough grays besides to mount the band and the trumpeters; while the left-overs, the duns, brindles, piebalds, and buckskins were for the eleventh troop. Then, according to his seniority, each troop commander was allowed to choose the color he favored. The lowest ranking troop commander naturally inherited the conglomeration of brindles, pintos and buckskins at the lower end of the picket-lines.

The gray horses were chosen by Captain

Smith, and eight years later, one of the last glimpses that white men had of Custer's troops as they marched off to their death, was this gray-horse troop gaily trotting into action, with its proud guidon flying in the breeze.

So bitter was the feeling against the hostiles at this time that Kansas had raised two volunteer cavalry regiments especially for Indian service. One of these, the Nineteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry, was commanded by Colonel S. J. Crawford, who had resigned as governor in order to lead the regiment against the Indians.

Custer's regiment, now moving to the south, established a great depot at the fork of Beaver and Wolf creeks, dubbing the station Camp Supply. By November 21, General Sully, General Sheridan and part of the Nineteenth Volunteer Kansas column, had reached the camp.

Since General Sheridan was acting only as department commander, in ordinary military usage the command of the expedition would have fallen to Colonel Crawford of the Kansas Volunteers, as both General Custer and General Sully were only lieutenant colonels in the regular

army. However, at this time, the regulations held that in case the regular army and volunteers came together, the officers holding the highest brevet rank (a reward for conspicuous war service, greatly abused and later discontinued) would be senior. Sully, who was a brevet brigadier-general, immediately issued an order assuming command.

At once Custer followed with an order of his own, announcing that as he was a brevet major-general of the regular army he ranked both Sully and Crawford, and that he would assume command. The matter was referred to General Sheridan who held that Custer was within his rights, and that he was actually the senior officer. Sully was at once dispatched to Fort Harker to command the district of the upper Arkansas, and Custer now had the actual command of the entire outfit. It was a characteristic Custer gesture.

At daylight, on November 23, 1868, in the midst of a heavy snowstorm and intense cold, Custer led his Seventh Cavalry out of the stockade of Camp Supply in the hope of surprising the Indian villages known to be wintering in the

south. The horses of the troops of the Nineteenth Kansas had been badly used up, and in order to assure quick mobility, Custer took only his own Seventh with him, Sheridan with the rest of the outfit remaining behind.

For five days the men and horses floundered and slipped through snow, sleet, and ice, through storms and bad weather, making fifteen to twenty miles of bitter progress each day. At daybreak, on the 26th, Major Elliott with three troops of the Seventh, and a handful of Osage scouts—the same “oil” Osages who today are the wealthiest group of human beings in the world—started up the north bank of the Canadian River on a search for Indian trails.

Towards afternoon, while Custer and the remaining troops were helping the wagon train over a bad crossing, a white scout galloped up with information that Major Elliott, whose forces were about twelve miles away, had run across the fresh camp of a war party of 150 Indians who had pulled out not more than twenty-four hours previously.

“Get a fresh mount, ride as hard as you can to Major Elliott and tell him to follow the trail

until dark, and then wait for the rest of the command to join him," Custer directed. Then he ordered officers' call to be sounded, gave instructions that seven wagons and one ambulance be loaded with extra ammunition and light supplies, directed that all troopers carry one hundred rounds of ammunition on their person and prepare to mount at once and follow him. The remainder of the wagon train, with a guard of eighty men mounted on the weaker horses and under the command of the officer of the day, was to follow as rapidly as possible.

It so happened that Captain Hamilton, grandson of the illustrious Alexander Hamilton was, at this particular moment, officer of the day. The order specified that he would have to stop behind with the wagon train and consequently miss the fighting. At once he sought out Custer, and begged that some junior officer be appointed to take his place so that he could join his own troop.

"I'm sorry, Hamilton, but I can't do it," Custer told him.

"Isn't there any way I can go, general?" Hamilton pleaded.

"Well, if you can get some officer to exchange places with you, it will be all right with me," Custer replied.

Immediately, Hamilton sought his brother officers, pleading for someone to take his place as officer of the day. Finally he ran across Lieutenant E. G. Mathey, who was suffering from acute snow-blindness, and Mathey reluctantly consented to stay behind with the water train.

Taking up the march at once, Custer pushed on, and at nine o'clock that evening joined up with Major Elliott's squadron. After an hour's halt for coffee, the entire command moved out under definite instructions from Custer to light no matches and to converse only in low tones.

At the head of the column went Chief Little Beaver and two or three of his Osage scouts, and directly behind them rode General Custer. It was evident they were near the enemy.

The moon had risen, and in the crisp, cold night the sound of the horses' hoofs breaking through the snow crust could be heard for a considerable distance. Custer ordered that the column remain a half-mile behind the scouts.

"In order to judge the situation more cor-

rectly," Custer later wrote, "I this time accompanied the two Osages. Silently we advanced, I mounted, they on foot, keeping ahead of my horse. Upon nearing the crest of each hill, as is invariably the Indian custom, one of the guides would hasten a few steps in advance and peer cautiously over the hill. Accustomed to this, I was not struck by observing it until once, when the same one who discovered the fire, advanced cautiously to the crest and looked carefully into the valley beyond.

"I saw him place his hand above his eyes as if looking intently at some object, then crouch down and come creeping back to where I waited for him. 'What is it?' I inquired as soon as he reached my horse's side. 'Heaps Injuns down there,' pointing in the direction from which he had just come.

"Quickly dismounting and giving the reins to the other guide, I accompanied the Osage to the crest, both of us crouching low so as not to be seen in the moonlight against the horizon. Looking in the direction indicated, I could indistinctly recognize the presence of a large body of animals of some kind in the valley below, and

at a distance which then seemed not more than a half-mile. I looked at them long and anxiously, the guide uttering not a word, but was unable to discover anything in their appearance different but what might be presented by a herd of buffalo under similar circumstances.

"Turning to the Osage, I inquired in a low tone why he thought they were Indians. 'Me heard dog bark,' was the satisfactory reply. Indians are noted for the large number of dogs always found in their villages, but never accompanying their war parties. I waited quietly to be convinced; I was assured, but wanted to be doubly so. I was rewarded in a moment by the barking of a dog in the heavy timber off to the right of the herd, and soon after I heard the tinkling of a small bell. This convinced me that it was really the Indian herd I then saw, the bell being one worn around the neck of some pony who was probably the leader of the herd. I turned to retrace my steps when another sound was borne to my ear through the cold, clear atmosphere of the valley—*it was the distant cry of an infant*; and savages though they were, and justly outlawed by the number and atrocity of

their recent murders and depredations on the helpless settlers of the frontier, I could not but regret that in a war such as we were forced to engage in, the mode and circumstances would possibly prevent discrimination. . . .”

Undaunted by the cry of the little Indian papoose or the fact that scores of women and children were about to be killed in the coming encounter, Custer hurried back to his command and laid out his plans for the assault. The village was to be attacked at daybreak from all sides, and the careful disposition of the eleven troops was made.

“The plan was for each party to approach as closely to the village as possible without being discovered, and there await the approach of daylight. . . . In this order we began to descend the slope leading down to the village. . . . Immediately in the rear of my horse came the band, all mounted and each with his instrument in readiness to begin playing, the moment their leader, who rode at their head, and who kept his cornet to his lips, should receive the signal.

“I had previously told him to play ‘Garry-owen’ as the opening piece. We had approached

near enough to the village now to plainly catch a view here and there of the tall white lodges as they stood in irregular order among the trees. From the openings at the top of some of them we could perceive faint columns of smoke ascending, the occupants no doubt having kept up their feeble fires during the night.

"We had approached so near the village that from the dead silence which reigned I feared the lodges were deserted, the Indians having fled before we advanced. I was about to turn in my saddle and direct the signal for attack to be given, still anxious as to where the other detachments were, when a single rifle shot rang sharp and clear on the far end of the village from where we were. Quickly turning to the band leader, I directed him to give us 'Garryowen.'

"At once the rollicking notes of that familiar marching and fighting air sounded forth through the valley, and in a moment were reechoed back from the opposite sides by the loud and continued cheers of the men of the other detachments, who, true to their orders, were there and in readiness to pounce upon the Indians the moment attack began. In this manner the Battle of Wichita commenced.



In this manner the Battle of Wichita commenced.

"The bugles sounded the charge, and the entire command dashed rapidly into the village. The Indians were caught napping, but realizing at once the dangers of their situation, they quickly overcame their first surprise and in an instant seized their rifles, bows and arrows and sprang behind the nearest trees, while some leaped into the stream nearly waist-deep and using the bank as a rifle-pit, began a vigorous defense.

"Mingled with the exultant cheers of my men could be heard the defiant war-whoop of the warriors, who from the first fought with a desperation and courage which no race of men can surpass. Actual possession of the village and its lodges was ours within a few moments after the charge was made, but this was an empty victory unless we could vanquish the late occupants, who were then pouring a rapid and well-directed fire from their stations behind trees and banks.

"At the first onset, a considerable number of Indians rushed from the village in the direction from which Elliott's party had attacked. Some broke through the lines, while others came in contact with the mounted troopers and were killed or captured. . . .

"In the meanwhile, our temporary hospital had been established in the center of the village, where the wounded were receiving such surgical care as circumstances would permit. Our losses had been severe, indeed we were not then aware how great they had been.

"Hamilton, who rode at my side when we entered the village, and whose soldierly tones I heard for the last time as he calmly cautioned his squadron, 'Now, men, keep cool, fire low, and not too rapidly,' was among the first victims of the opening charge, having been shot from his saddle by a bullet from an Indian rifle. He died instantly. His lifeless remains were tenderly carried by some of his troopers to the vicinity of the hospital." (It was the same Hamilton who only a few hours before had pleaded with Custer not to be left behind with the wagon train.)

By this time, Indians from camps lower down the river bottom had opened up an attack on Custer's men. Major Elliott and nineteen men, surrounded at some distance from the village, had been killed to the last man. Besides his own wounded, Custer had fifty-seven captured In-

dian squaws and children and eight hundred ponies.

Ordering each Indian to procure a mount and the remaining ponies shot and the camp burned, he directed that the regiment form in battle front and march down the valley directly towards the lower villages. Himself in the lead, with his band playing "Ain't I Glad to Get Out of the Wilderness"—an old Civil War favorite—and with flags and guidons waving and bugles blowing, the command marched straight into the teeth of the Indians.

It was a bold move that only a man of Custer's spirited and fearless disposition would have dared order. As a matter of fact, he was in a desperate situation; the hostiles outnumbered him possibly five to one, and he was thirty or forty miles away from his wagon train, which was guarded only by a small force of eighty men. He had wounded men and fifty-seven prisoners, and he was three days away from his base. Only a magnificent bluff could save him from certain disaster.

With the short winter twilight dropping down, Custer now suddenly ordered his troopers

to retrace their steps, and then under cover of the friendly darkness, he quickly took up the march back towards the wagon train. At midnight the column halted, while one squadron was pushed on to assure safety to the helpless train. The next day the forces joined, and the march back to Camp Supply was undertaken.

At once Custer dispatched his chief scout California Joe with a report to General Sheridan. Two days later Joe returned with an order from General Sheridan, commending Custer and the Seventh for their successful attack. Custer immediately sent a courier informing Sheridan of the hour of his arrival and suggesting that his men would be proud to march in review before him. The following day, when within a few miles of the camp, staff officers met the column with assurances that General Sheridan would be delighted. Custer himself described this parade:

"First rode our Osage guides and trailers, dressed and painted in the extremest fashions of war according to their rude customs and ideas. As we advanced, these warriors chanted their war songs, fired their guns in triumph, and at intervals gave utterance to their shrill war-

whoops. Next came the scouts riding abreast, with California Joe astride his faithful mule bringing up the right, but unable, even during this ceremonious and formal occasion, to dispense with his pipe. Immediately in rear of the scouts rode the Indian prisoners under guard, all mounted on Indian ponies, and in their dress conspicuous by its bright colors, many of them wearing the scarlet blanket so popular with the wild tribes, presenting quite a contrast to the dull and motley colors worn by the scouts.

"Some little distance in rear came the troops formed in columns of platoons, the leading platoon preceded by the band playing 'Garryowen,' being composed of the sharpshooters under Colonel Cook; followed in succession by the squadrons in the regular order of march.

"In this order and arrangement, we marched proudly in front of our chief, who, as the officers rode by, giving him the military salute with the saber, returned their formal courtesy by a graceful lifting of his cap and a pleased look of recognition from his eyes, which spoke his approbation in a language far more powerful than studied words could have done.

"In speaking of the review afterwards, General Sheridan said the appearance of the troops, with the bright rays of the sun reflected from their burnished arms and equipments as they advanced in beautiful order and precision down the slope, the band playing and the blue of the soldiers' uniforms slightly relieved by the gaudy colors of the Indians, both the captives and Osages, the strangely fantastic part played by the Osage guides, their shouts, chanting their war songs, and firing their guns in the air, all combined to render the scene one of the most beautiful and highly interesting he remembered ever having witnessed."

It made Custer's Indian reputation. To his great Civil War record was now added that of being one of the most successful Indian-fighters in the United State Army.

Tracking a slippery and difficult foe, Custer did not hesitate to bring to bear any measures he thought necessary. Starting out five days later, he and his column, with Sheridan personally accompanying them, went back over the battle grounds and continued on their march after the retreating Indians. Making contact with



Only a magnificent bluff could save
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a large band of Indians, Custer, under a flag of truce, and on Sheridan's orders, grabbed the two most important chiefs, Santana and Lone Wolf, and held them as hostages for the peaceful return of the Indians to their reservations. Seeing that the hostiles were about to slip away, Sheridan directed Custer to announce that if the tribes did not begin their march back to the reservations by the following evening, the two chiefs would be hanged. The ethics were questionable, but the results were successful.

Custer returned to Camp Supply for the winter, and, with his own Seventh and the Nineteenth Kansas, started early the following spring after the Cheyennes. Making contact with them some days later, he discovered that they held two white women as prisoners. Instead of attacking them, when the chiefs visited him under a flag of truce and he discovered that the village was slipping away, he promptly seized them and then decreed that if the white women were not turned over by the following day, he would hang the chiefs and attack the village. With the white captives safely delivered, he then ordered the tribe to their reservation under penalty of attack.

It was rough treatment—but it worked. All but a few of the Indians in Custer's territory were now whipped onto their reservations, where they could be cheated by their unscrupulous Indian agents, half starved on bad rations, debased by white man's whisky and his diseases.

Custer—the bit of destiny—had done his work well. His regiment had many scalps to its credit. From one end of the country to the other, his Seventh Cavalry was now famous. His soldiers were recognized “old” Indian-fighters, and Indian-fighters were the popular heroes in those days following the Civil War.

That year, and the next one, Custer and his regiment had little to do. He found ample time to hunt buffaloes and act as host and guide to the strange-looking English lords and dukes visiting the Far West.

“The general thinks more of his dogs and horses than he does of us,” one disgruntled private who had suffered thirty days' extra duty announced to his bunkies.

As a matter of fact, this trooper had been made into a real soldier, and he didn't know it. To weld the Seventh into a regular outfit, a well-

disciplined, smart regiment that was always ready for a frolic or a fight, had cost General Custer no little amount of popularity among both his officers and men.

He had little use for "professional" boozers, loafers or malingerers. He wasn't always tactful or careful in his handling of even his officers. In the restricted army life of the frontier post, harmony and genuine loyalty were almost next to impossible, and Custer did not go out of his way to try to promote them. If some of the older officers wanted to be envious and jealous of him, if they wanted to misunderstand his intense desire to make a great regiment out of the Seventh, well, that was their own business.

In 1871, the regiment was split up into single and two-troop detachments, and sent to Kentucky and South Carolina to ferret out illicit distillers, and break up the Ku Klux Klan. Custer himself was stationed in a small garrison forty miles south of Louisville. Here he hunted to his heart's content, lost money through dabbling in blooded horses, and wrote his "Life on the Plains" for the *Galaxy Magazine*.

In March, 1873, came the welcome orders for

Custer to assemble his beloved regiment at Memphis, and by boat journey up the broad Mississippi and the muddy Missouri to Yankton, and then disembarking, take up the long six hundred-mile march northward to Fort Rice, Wyoming.

Those were good days for Custer. Again he had about him the men he loved—his brother Tom, the gay young bachelor who wore two congressional medals of honor; Calhoun, who the year before had married his sister Maggie; "Queen's Own" Cook with his Dundreary whiskers; Yates, with his smart "bandbox" troop; Smith, with his gray-horse troop and his shattered arm; Keogh, the gallant Irish soldier of fortune who had served in the papal forces, and with two other fighting Celts had hurried to America and joined the Union forces early in the Civil War. All brave lads, and all to die with their young leader that June Sunday, three years later on the Little Bighorn in Montana.

They were going up there now. They were going where they could again hear the hot ping-ping of bullets, the swish of deadly arrows, the blood-curdling war-whoops, the pound of charg-

ing horses, the shrill bugle-notes, the thrilling song of "Garryowen," the whole mad and glorious call of battle.

They sang of their journey and of their regiment:

For seven long years I courted Nancy,

Hi Ho! the rolling river;

For seven long years I courted Nancy,

Hi Ho! we're bound away for the wild Missoureye.

She would not have me for her lover,

Hi Ho! the rolling river;

She would not have me for her lover,

Hi Ho! we're bound away for the wild Missoureye.

Because I was a cavalry soldier,

Hi Ho! the rolling river;

Because I was a cavalry soldier,

Hi Ho! we're bound away for the wild Missoureye.

CHAPTER SIX

BY the summer of 1873, Jay Cooke's Northern Pacific Railroad, which was to run from Duluth on Lake Superior to the Columbia River in eastern Oregon, had reached the banks of the upper Missouri at Bismark, North Dakota. In this spot in 1804, Lewis and Clark had dug in for the long northern winter, just as Cooke's railroad was to dig in now for several winters, toss a bridge over the wide stream and shoot its long arm of steel across the once sacred Indian lands of Montana.

But in the spring of 1873, only a tentative route had been decided on, and it was necessary to send out a large surveying party under heavy guard to keep it from being attacked and destroyed by the hostiles. Custer and his regiment were to form the major part of the expedition.

The Sioux were again in bad temper. Following Little Crow's terrible massacre of some four hundred Minnesota settlers in the Indian summer

of 1862, the tribes had received harsh and necessary punishment from the soldiers under General Sully. Forced treaties, broken pledges, and the eternal crowding of the pioneers on their lands had brought on the brutal uprising. Scores of innocent Indians were unavoidably killed in the reprisals.

A few years later, the miners of western Montana and Idaho demanded a short-cut trail to their settlements. The army, contrary to Indian pledges, laid out the road and built the protecting forts. This had brought on the annihilation of Colonel Fetterman and his ninety-one soldiers outside the gates of Fort Phil Kearney in December, 1866.

In July of the year following, congress passed an act to establish peace with the hostile Indian tribes, and a commission, with no less a personage than General Sherman at its head, met Red Cloud's representatives at Fort Laramie on September 13, 1867. After months of dilly-dallying, the Treaty of 1868 was agreed upon.

Among other things, the government agreed to close up the Bozeman trail, dismantle the forts and set aside a tract as a great Sioux reservation,

taking in what is now the entire state of South Dakota west of the Missouri River, "for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation of the Indians herein named."

The government also expressly agreed and stipulated that the country north of the North Platte River, and east of the summits of the Big-horn Mountains, should be held and considered to be unceded Indian territory, and that no white person should be permitted to occupy any portion of this ground, or pass through it without first obtaining the consent of the Indians. No northern line was defined, but the Indians held that their natural hunting grounds extended to the Yellowstone River.

For three years there was no serious trouble with the Sioux, but in 1871 the Northern Pacific decided that their only practical westward route lay south of the Yellowstone River, directly across the finest buffalo lands of the Sioux. From the first of the surveying expeditions there had been difficulty with the Indian "irreconcilables," and in 1872 a railroad party and its cavalry escort were attacked by hostiles under Black Moon, and several men killed and wounded. On

October 2, Indians boldly attacked Fort Abraham Lincoln, opposite Bismarck, and on the following day pitched into a detachment of the Twenty-second and Twenty-seventh Infantry.

That spring of 1873, while Custer and his Seventh Cavalry were marching northwards, singing their "Hi Ho! the Rolling River!" the Northern Pacific Railroad induced Indian Commissioner Smith to appoint a special commission to meet with the Sioux, and secure their consent to run the railroad through their lands. The mighty chief Red Cloud was by this time thoroughly disillusioned as to the desire or the ability of the white man to keep faith with the Indians, and gave his consent for the younger anti-whites to refuse the new demands and openly harass the intruders.

For several years past, a certain Indian medicine-man had been preaching the doctrine of fear and hate of the white man. From his boyhood, he had witnessed the steady white encroachments on the lands of his people. He had seen treaty after treaty, pledge after pledge, swept under foot and crushed in the relentless march of civilization. He had seen thousands of

his race ruined by contact with the border ruffians, the whisky-smugglers, the disease-spreaders, the pale-face soul-wreckers.

His name was Sitting Bull. He was a squat, broad-shouldered, bantam-legged fanatic, who walked with a limp. He saw the handwriting on the wall—his race doomed, his buffaloes wantonly slaughtered, his lands taken from him, his old life ended forever.

With Sitting Bull, in his campaign of hate, stood Crazy Horse and Gall, Black Moon and Spotted Tail, American Horse and Fast Bull, Scabby Head and Rain-in-the-Face and Fast Bear; all chiefs of the different Sioux bands; all bitter and determined to hold out against the whites; and all to meet three years later in the valley of the Little Bighorn in their last stand against Custer and his soldiers.

It was into this rising tempest of bitterness and determination that Custer rode that July day of 1873. At the head of the surveying party he was to escort, he found his old West Point classmate, General Thomas L. Rosser, who had resigned from the academy when Texas left the Union, and had risen to command a division of

Confederate cavalry. At the battle of Woodstock Races, Custer, with a division of Union Cavalry, had soundly thrashed his classmate, and had come within an ace of capturing him. They had been gallant enemies on the field of battle and now, high up in the Montana Indian country, they were gallant friends against a common enemy.

To Custer, this summer of 1873 was one of welcome bits of action and thrills. As the principal commander of the military escort, he found just enough spirited Indian-fighting to keep him happy.

On the morning of August 4, pushing ahead of the main party with two troops of his Seventh, and with his favorite scout, a young Arikara warrior named Bloody Knife—later to give his life for his white master on the Little Bighorn—Custer suddenly found himself cut off and surrounded. Riding alone, he was two or three hundred yards in the far advance when he sensed his desperate situation. Wheeling his horse, he raced for his men, now dismounted and firing calmly at the charging Indians.

It was a short, hot fight, and except for the

providential arrival of reenforcements, the same fate that befell him three years later might have swept over him this day. Straggling along behind this advance guard, a soldier and the regimental veterinarian and an army storekeeper had been discovered by the Indians, and all three had been killed and scalped.

September found Custer and his regiment back in Fort Rice, and later that fall he was ordered to Fort Lincoln as the commanding officer of the post. The winter months, he and Mrs. Custer spent in New York, and the following spring, he returned to the fort and started preparations for an expedition into the Black Hills. Rumors of gold, brought out by the Indians, had fired the imagination of thousands of frontier men. Custer, eager for action and adventure, welcomed the suggestion from General Sheridan that he explore these forbidden hills and report just what he found. Up to that time no government man had ever penetrated this unknown country, pledged by treaty to be forever Sioux land.

On July 1, 1874, Custer trotted out from Fort Lincoln at the head of his swagger Seventh Cav-



SITTING BULL

alry—again a tiny bit of destiny involved willy-nilly in forces that were as great and uncompromising as time and tide. His hand was to pull the lever that was to start the huge engines of conquest and absorption; but the force that gave them their irresistible momentum was the urge of nature itself, the Spirit of Man, Civilization.

Two months later, Custer sent a message to the nearest telegraph head with his report to be dispatched to departmental headquarters at St. Paul. The following day, the news went singing over a dozen wires, stirring eager men, driving them into this new wave of conquest that would not be denied. It read in part:

"Gold has been found at several places, and it is the belief of those who are giving their attention to this subject that it will be found in paying quantities. I have upon my table forty or fifty particles of pure gold, in size averaging that of a small pin head, and most of it obtained today from one panful of earth. As we have never remained in camp longer than one day, it will be readily understood that there is no opportunity to make a satisfactory examination in

regard to deposits of valuable minerals. Veins of lead and strong indications of silver have been found. . . .

"Veins of what the geologists term gold-bearing quartz crop out on almost every hillside, but in one place, and the only one within my knowledge where so great a depth was reached, a hole was dug eight feet in depth, the miners report that they found gold among the roots of the grass; and from that point to the lowest point reached, gold was found in paying quantities.

"On some of the watercourses, almost every panful of earth produced gold in small yet paying quantities. It has not required an expert to find gold in the Black Hills, as men without former experience in mining have discovered it at an expense of but little time and labor."

Less than a year before, the Black Friday of 1873 had brought on the greatest panic America had ever suffered. Hundreds of thousands of men were idle, discouraged, and desperate. To them Custer's promise of gold brought dreams of sudden wealth.

Almost overnight the march toward the for-

bidden hills began. Within twenty-four hours after the news reached Yankton, southward on the Missouri River, progenitors of our modern Chambers of Commerce and Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, assembled at a great mass meeting and started the campaign to make their fair city the one outfitting port of entry to the gold fields. Posters were struck off, and sent over the country pointing out that "Yankton can be reached in parlor cars, thence on palatial steamers over the Missouri River to Fort Pierre, and thence a three days' drive in sumptuous stage-coaches over a beautiful prairie directly into the heart of the diggings."

Custer had started something that neither he nor any other man could stop. It was the tragic destiny of Indian dealings that no man-made compact, no legislation, was ever to be able to check the endless, restless search for gold and free homes.

So great was this rush for gold, that four days after Custer's announcement had been given out, General Sheridan telegraphed from his military headquarters in Chicago to General Terry in command of the Department of Dakota, pro-

hibiting all whites from entering the Black Hills and ordering Terry to send troops along the Missouri and the Platte to turn back forcibly all parties, and to seize and destroy their outfits. Hundreds were stopped, and many who did slip through the lines were later rounded up and sent back under arrest to the nearest towns—where the civil authorities promptly turned them loose.

But it was as useless as attempting to sweep back the incoming tide with a broom. The government and the army were helpless before the insatiable hunger of these pioneers. The whole West was screaming its demands that the Indians be driven to smaller and smaller reservations, and their lands given to the white men.

On May 22, 1875, Custer, visiting in New York, said in an interview with a reporter of the New York Herald: "The Indians are quiet now and offering no armed resistance, because they have been told by the military officers that the government will keep its word. But the moment they think that it is not acting in good faith, there will be a rising of every tribe between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains."

It was a prophecy that was all too true. Three weeks later, the Secretary of the Interior, under whom was the Department of Indian Affairs, appointed a special commission, including General Terry, to secure from the Indians the right for white men to open mines in the Black Hills. By the Treaty of 1868, it required three-fourths of all the male Indians to legalize a sale of Indian lands, and being convinced that this would be impossible, the commission attempted to purchase only the mining rights. But, after weeks of parley, even this was found impossible, and in the end the whole movement failed.

Sheridan, in disgust, ordered the military to be withdrawn, and immediately miners by the thousands poured into the forbidden country. By March, 1876, eleven thousand men were in Custer City alone.

The whole region was being overrun by whites; and back on the buffalo ranges of the Powder River valley, back in the Rosebud and the Bighorn countries, Sitting Bull, and Gall, and Crazy Horse, and Black Moon, and American Horse preached their gospel of hate.

Determined to stand for no more foolishness,

the government, through the Indian department, announced on December 6, 1875, that all the Northern Indians who did not report at their agencies by January 31 would be considered as hostiles, and that they would be turned over to the war department to be dealt with as the army saw fit. Angry and hopeless, the warriors wintering on the buffalo lands of the Powder River valley chanted their war songs and vowed their vengeance.

They were certain now that their precious Black Hills were to be taken away from them by force, without the slightest regard for their ancient rights and unquestioned treaties. There was nothing to do but make one last desperate stand against the whites. If they must die, they would die fighting.

Twilight was falling for the once free and happy Sioux—the short, swift twilight of the high prairies. And silhouetted against the skyline in the fading light, stood the figure of Custer, their conqueror.

In the frontier army post of Fort Lincoln, that early spring of 1876, Custer was eagerly

and joyously preparing for the final campaign against the hostiles. Sheridan had carefully laid his plans for the great enveloping movement that would crush or capture the irresponsibles, and either exterminate them or drive them onto the reservations where they could be kept in hand.

Custer was to command the column that was to march westward from Fort Lincoln. From the southward, from old Fort Phil Kearney where Colonel Fetterman and his ninety-one men had been killed, grizzled old General Crook, the "Gray Fox," was to march with a large command toward the north into the valley of the Powder River. At the same time, a third column under General John Gibbon (he of the famous Second Corps, the "Iron Corps" of Gettysburg and a dozen other Civil War battlefields) was to march eastward with a smaller command from Fort Ellis in the far western part of the territory, and join Custer and Crook.

Sitting Bull and the rest of the hostiles were to be crushed in this three-pronged nutcracker, crushed and eliminated forever. And Custer, the great Indian-fighter, with the pride of his

heart—his gallant Seventh Cavalry—was to be in at the kill.

But destiny was to have its final go at the golden-haired Custer—great destiny against this frail bit of destiny.

That spring of 1876, Democratic politicians in Washington, searching for campaign ammunition to shoot at President Grant during the end of his second term, and to use in the coming presidential election, suddenly recalled a letter that General Hazen had written in January, 1872, from his post at Fort Sill, Indian Territory, to his friend Congressman James A. Garfield, which had been turned over by Garfield to the New York Tribune representative and published in that paper on February 16, 1872. This letter bore the extraordinary information that John S. Evans, army-post trader at Fort Sill, was paying \$12,000 a year to Caleb P. Marsh, of New York, for the privilege of continuing as post trader, the intimation being that Secretary of War Belknap was personally profiting.

For four years this accusation had lain undisturbed, but now in the spring of 1876, it was dug out and made the principal item in the in-

dictment of Belknap by the House of Representatives, and in his subsequent impeachment trial by the United States Senate. On March 2, at eleven o'clock in the morning, Heister Clymer, chairman of the committee on expenditures in the war department, submitted a report bringing charges against Belknap; and almost immediately a letter in President Grant's own handwriting and marked 10:20 A. M., was sent to the House announcing the resignation of Belknap as secretary of war. But the good Democrats were not to be denied, and impeachment proceedings began.

This day Custer was completing his final arrangements for the great campaign against the Sioux. It is true that he had been talking a little too much for a circumspect army officer. He had stumbled on collusion between certain post traders and Indian agents. In the previous September, he had personally refused to accept two thousand sacks of corn sent from Fort Peck, each bag bearing the stamped legend, "U. S. Ind. Dept." He believed the corn had been stolen from Indian rations, and was being resold to the army. He wired his action to his depart-

ment commander at St. Paul, and shortly a message came along ordering him to accept the shipment. He was sure this order had come directly from Secretary of War Belknap, and he didn't mind broadcasting his suspicions.

He had also openly stated that Orville Grant, the President's own brother, had been paid \$1,000 to secure a post tradership for a man named Reynolds. He felt that there was a strong odor of graft around the war department and he didn't hesitate to make his views known. He was a Democrat, and he rather enjoyed airing his views of this Republican administration of Grant's. Somehow, some way, Mr. Heister Clymer found out that Custer had some damaging information against Belknap, and wasn't afraid to talk. Immediately, he sent for him to come to Washington and testify. Custer wired back:

FORT LINCOLN, DAKOTA,
March 16, 1876.

HON. HEISTER CLYMER:

While I hold myself in readiness to obey the summons of your committee, I telegraph to state that I am engaged upon an important expedition, intended to operate

against the hostile Indians, and I expect to take the field early in April. My presence here is deemed very necessary. In view of this, would it not be satisfactory for you to forward to me such questions as may be necessary, allowing me to return my replies by mail?

GEORGE A. CUSTER

But politics must have its fling, so Custer was ordered to report at Washington at once. Fearlessly, and almost proudly, he told what he knew about the post traderships, and the graft connected with them. He got his name and his picture in the paper. It turned out that he was one of the star witnesses against Grant's personal friend ex-Secretary of War Belknap.

With his examination finished, he was eager to return to his troops and the campaign. He heard that President Grant was angry and bitter at the part he had taken. He called to see the President. For hours he was kept waiting in the anteroom. Then he called again and was refused an audience. For a third time he visited the White House, this time sending in a note:

TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT:

Today for the third time I have sought an interview with the President, not to solicit a favor, except to be granted a brief hearing, but to remove from his mind certain unjust impressions concerning myself which I have reason to believe are entertained against me. I desire this opportunity simply as a matter of justice, and I regret that the President has declined to give me an opportunity to submit to him a brief statement which justice to him, as well as to me, demanded.

Respectfully submitted

G. A. CUSTER, *Lt. Col. 7th Cavalry*
Bvt. Maj. Genl. U. S. Army

But the conqueror of Lee remained unmoved. He refused to see Custer. Smarting under the snub, and worried about the expedition against the Sioux, Custer hurried to General Sherman's office to report his departure to his post. Sherman was away in New York and Custer, after reporting to the attorney-general, took the train for the West. The next day, Sheridan—Custer's chief and intimate friend—received the following message in Chicago:

WASHINGTON, D. C.

May 2, 1876.

GENERAL P. H. SHERIDAN, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS:

I am at this moment advised that General Custer started last night for Saint Paul and Fort Abraham Lincoln. He was not justified in leaving without seeing the President or myself. Please intercept him at Chicago or St. Paul, and order him to halt and await further orders. Meanwhile, let the expedition from Fort Lincoln proceed without him.

W. T. SHERMAN, *General*

Two days later, when he stepped off the train at Chicago, Custer, impatient and eager for service was handed this telegram and an order from General Sheridan that he should await further instructions in Chicago.

It was a blow in the dark. Custer, stunned and angry, dispatched a long explanatory telegram to Sherman, and then followed it by another requesting that while awaiting instructions he at least be permitted to go on to Fort Lincoln. In answer to this, Sherman wired to Sheridan:

Have received your dispatch today announcing General Custer's arrival. Have just come from the President, who orders that General Custer be allowed to rejoin his post, to remain there on duty, but not to accompany the expedition supposed to be on the point of starting against the hostile Indians under General Terry.

W. T. SHERMAN, *General*

To placate matters with Grant, Custer then wired Heister Clymer, chairman of the Belknap investigating committee, that he had since learned that Belknap had not had any part in ordering that the corn in the Indian department bags be accepted, but that the order had come from General Terry at St. Paul, and that he wanted this telegram to be made a part of his testimony.

On May 6, the crestfallen and beaten Custer took his pride in his hand and dispatched through General Terry this appeal:

SAINT PAUL, MINN., MAY 6, 1876
ADJUTANT GENERAL, DIVISION OF MISSOURI, CHICAGO

I forward the following:

To His Excellency the President, through
Military Channels:

I have seen your order transmitted through the general of the army, directing that I be not permitted to accompany the expedition about to move against the hostile Indians. As my entire regiment forms a part of the proposed expedition, and as I am the senior officer of the regiment on duty in this department, I respectfully, but most earnestly request that, while not allowed to go in command of the expedition, I may be permitted to serve with my regiment in the field. *I appeal to you as a soldier to spare me the humiliation of seeing my regiment march to meet the enemy and I not to share its dangers.*

G. A. CUSTER
Bvt. Maj. Genl. U. S. Army

It was too much for Grant, *the soldier*. The following day he gave his consent for Custer to go with the expedition as commander of the Seventh Cavalry.

CHAPTER SEVEN

OUT on the high buffalo lands of Montana, the ta-plum—ta-plum—ta-plum of the Indian war drums rose and fell in a dozen hostile camps.

They were pounding out the march-beat of their doom—the swan-song of their vanishing race.

In the council teepees, Sitting Bull, Gall, and Crazy Horse raised their voices, so that the youngest brave on the farthest edge could hear:

“The white men want our Black Hills. They want our buffalo lands. They will take them. They will herd us in their agencies, where they will cheat us and lie to us, take our women, teach our young to be drunkards, rob us of our old life. God did not make us agency Indians—he made us free Indians. White men are sending their long swords after us now; Custer, whom we call Long Hair, Crook, the Gray Fox. If we fight them we shall be killed. But if we go back to agencies, we shall wither and die. Is it not

better to be killed in battle than to die like old squaws? Let us make one last mighty fight."

From the agencies along the Missouri and the Platte, red men quietly gathered in their pony herds, and in family groups, pointed north and west to the rich hunting grounds along the Powder, the Tongue and the Bighorn.

But in the family teepees, the squaws, busy with their cooking, nursing their children, and drying the buffalo meat, were fearful lest sorrow might come out of all of this speechmaking and defiance.

They could hear the drum beats now—the drums foretelling their approaching doom. Ta-plum—ta-plum—ta-plum.

At Fort Abraham Lincoln, high up on the wild, muddy Missouri, in the Dakotas, a penetrating foreboding likewise swept the little post, this spring of 1876. Tragedy was in the air.

Officers' wives of the Seventh Cavalry would suddenly stop their garrison gossip and glance towards the door, as if they, too, had caught the echo of doom eerily knocking.

The regiment was going out against the In-

dians. Custer was to command it; that would mean action and death for many.

It was marching away this very day, and the mounted band was gaily playing "Garryowen." It was the Seventh's battle tune; it was Custer's own. It was high-spirited and brave. It made your heart beat fast and your eyes sparkle.

Around the parade ground marched the splendid regiment, and at the head rode bewhiskered old General Terry, and the yellow-haired Custer. He had his long curls cut off now, but as his bay gelding pranced to the rolling music, he was as picturesque and gallant as the day when he had charged Jeb Stuart's Confederate cavalry at Gettysburg, or received Lee's flag of surrender at Appomattox.

Drawn up now in regimental front, the ranks were broken for a moment so that the married officers and men might say a final good-bye to their families.

Then the bugle called them back to their horses.

"Prepare to mount!" the call came.

"Mount!" And then at "Forward!" the regiment swung into columns of fours and moved

out towards the waiting wagon train, with the three companies of infantry on foot in front and rear.

The band struck up "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

The officers and men turned in their saddles and waved their hats at the little knot of women gathered on the edge of the parade ground.

Again and again the band repeated the half-gay, half-prophetic piece. They were far off now, and the notes floating back to the little group came fainter and fainter.

The dust rose up under the feet of marching men and horses. Soon even the wagon train was hard to follow. Long ago the music had become but a memory. . . .

Only a cloud of dust told where the marching column was.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IT was seven o'clock in the morning of May 17, when Custer led his full regiment of twelve troops out from the parade ground to the head of the long and formidable "Eastern Column," which in conjunction with General Crook's "Southern Column" of some twelve hundred men, and General Gibbon's "Western Column" of four hundred men, was to attack any and all Indians they could find in the Montana buffalo lands, and drive them back to the reservations.

Sheridan and Terry, with Sherman now full general of the army, barely had saved Custer from the wrath of Grant. A misstep now, a half-failure, an unsuccessful campaign, and he would have to face a court martial on his return. It was an easy matter to find petty indiscretions and infringements of regulations on the part of an officer of Custer's eager and forceful temperament. There were whispers this day of an inspector who had found an unaccounted-for

army rifle that led back to the general's own orders. It would be easy enough to drum up charges that would stick.

But a daring victory, a bit of old Custer luck, would settle all this business quick enough. Let him only find the Indians—the more of them the better—let him lead his Seventh Cavalry against them, and his name would again sing so high that none, not even the President himself, would dare touch him.

Lovely Mrs. Custer rode by his side this first day. They talked of many things as they trotted along—of the general's young brother and his nephew, accompanying them on the expedition; of the hate that Major Reno, the senior officer in his command, and Benteen, his ranking captain, bore for him.

He would conciliate these two, and when the halt was made that first night, he divided the regiment into two battalions of six troops each. One he gave to Major Reno—the right wing. The left he gave to his senior captain Benteen. Surely this would prove his wish for harmony and good will. Soon there would be real work to do, and they would be needed.

That night in camp, the paymaster paid off the troopers. The first spring boat up the Missouri from the south had brought this welcome figure, but Custer, dead against the camp-followers, the gamblers, and whisky-pedlers who swept down like vultures on the post on pay day, had ordered that the men should not be paid the several months' wages due them until the column was well out of harm's way.

So this evening the long line of soldiers passed in single file by the paymaster's camp table and received their little roll of green and yellow bills.

Six weeks later, on that Sunday afternoon in June on the high bluffs along the Little Bighorn, when Sioux squaws and children stripped dusty, blood-stained clothes from these same troopers, they found these tiny rolls of green and yellow paper. The children played with them as they would with strings of beads; and Indian boys, molding their war ponies in the yellow clay, carefully folded these odd bits of colored, crinkly paper, and used them for saddle-blankets for their crude statuary.

But this night in middle May, troopers counted their pay—fifteen dollars a month, "easy

come, easy go"—and grumbled because "the old man" had cheated them out of a wild night, a splitting morning-after, and thirty days in the guardhouse. Possibly they, too, sensed the doom they were riding out to meet.

The next morning, at an early hour, the paymaster and Mrs. Custer turned their horses back toward the post, and the Seventh, with the wagon train and the beef herd, and the three companies of infantry, and the Gatling guns, and the Ree scouts, marched into the west.

For ten days the long column moved out over the rough and rolling country, making ten to thirty miles a day. On May 27, they reached the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri; and on May 31, they crossed the river. The next day a spring snowstorm pounced down on them, and they were held up for two days.

On June 7, the column struck the Powder River, and ordering the wagon train and the infantry to follow him and establish a base camp at its mouth, General Terry, with an escort, hurried the forty miles down the river to where it emptied into the Yellowstone. Here he found his supply steamer the *Far West*, under that

remarkable old skipper, Captain Grant Marsh, awaiting him, with 250 tons of forage for the horses, and other camp supplies.

Broadly speaking, the turbulent Yellowstone River runs from the snow-crowned peaks of the present Yellowstone Park eastward across the southern portion of Montana, and veering northeastward as it nears the Dakota border, empties into the Missouri, high up toward the Canadian line. Into this dangerous river, a number of tributaries flow down from the south: the Powder, the Tongue, the Rosebud, and the Bighorn with its branch, the soon-to-be-famous Little Bighorn.

The Indians were thought to be roaming somewhere in these green river valleys, exactly where, no one knew. The "Western Column" which two months ago had marched out of Fort Ellis in far-western Montana, under the courageous old general John Gibbon, had been patrolling the north bank of the Yellowstone. On this day of June 7, Gibbon, marching eastward between the Tongue and the Powder, dispatched couriers down the Yellowstone by canoe. These couriers had reached the Far West lying at the

mouth of Powder River, late on the afternoon of the 7th: and the following morning, General Terry with two troops of cavalry trotted into sight. Terry at once boarded the little craft and ordered her pushed westward up-stream until he met Gibbon.

On the morning of June 9, Gibbon, with a small escort, hailed the passing boat from the north shore, and a few minutes later came aboard. The *Far West* then pushed on west to Gibbon's main column, and after a conference the boat, bearing General Terry, the senior officer in charge of the combined forces of approximately fifteen hundred men, hurried eastward down the Yellowstone. On June 10, Terry had reached the camp at the junction of the Yellowstone and the Powder, and had joined Custer and his Seventh Cavalry.

Gibbon had furnished him with information that in all probability the Indians were somewhere south of the Yellowstone around the Tongue and Rosebud rivers; and Major Reno, with his six troops of the Seventh, was at once ordered to set out with pack mules, carrying ten days' rations, on a long scout.

While Major Reno with half the regiment set off for the river valleys to the southwest, Custer and the remainder of the regiment marched the forty miles down the Powder River, northward to where it flowed into the Yellowstone. Arriving at the base camp, the troopers helped establish the camp, and on the 15th, met the Far West returning to the junction with an additional battalion of infantry brought up from Stanley's Stockade to the east under Major Moore. The infantry was now left to guard the base camp, and Custer with his six troops and one Gatling gun, drawn by condemned cavalry mounts, and with the mules from the wagon trains now used as pack animals, set off to the westward up the Yellowstone for the mouth of the Tongue River.

Arriving at the rendezvous late the following afternoon, Custer and his troopers eagerly awaited the arrival of word from Major Reno. Tied up along the bank was the Far West, General Terry with his staff on board. Carefully, plans were being laid out for a rapid pursuit of the hostiles, should Reno strike a fresh trail. Pack mules were trained, equipment gone over,

and everything prepared for a quick and decisive movement.

Just at sunset of the 19th, a courier arrived with a dispatch from Reno. Up the Rosebud, some eighty or ninety miles to the southwest from Custer's camp, he had found an abandoned camp of four hundred lodges, and the heavy Indian trails very clearly bore off to the west toward the valley of the Bighorn. He had now reached the mouth of the Rosebud, on the south bank of the Yellowstone.

Immediately, a courier was dispatched with an order for Reno to halt. This same evening Custer started his command on the march westward to join Reno, not going into camp until darkness had settled down.

This night around the camp-fires, a thousand rumors sped from group to group. Old troopers spun yarns of gallant deeds of the Seventh.

On the afternoon of June 20, Custer and his six troops reunited with Reno, and the column moved westward as quickly as possible, and at noon on the 21st, bivouacked at the junction of the Rosebud and the Yellowstone.

Across the Yellowstone, General Gibbon and

his four hundred men were camped—the famous “Montana Squadron” of the old Second Cavalry and six troops of the Sixth U. S. Infantry. General Terry, supreme commander of the entire expedition, had already arrived with the Far West, and now having picked up General Gibbon, the boat crossed to the south bank of the Yellowstone, and Custer came on board. In Terry’s cabin, late that afternoon and evening, an all-important council of war took place, and final plans for the great drive against the Sioux were laid.

Custer, stepping from the gangplank of the Far West to his tent a few paces from the river bank, ordered his bugler to blow officers’ call.

In a minute, the score of hard-riding, hard-fighting men had gathered at his canvas headquarters.

“Gentlemen,” he began, “the Seventh will move up the Rosebud after the hostiles, sharp at twelve o’clock noon tomorrow. You are to take fifteen days’ rations of hardtack, coffee, and sugar, and twelve days’ rations of bacon on the pack mules. We will pick out the twelve strongest mules, equip them with the Spanish

aparejos, and carry fifty rounds of extra rifle ammunition per man—twenty-four thousand rounds in all. Every man will carry on his person and in his saddle-bags one hundred rounds of rifle ammunition and twenty-four rounds of pistol ammunition. Each man will carry twelve pounds of oats on his horse.”

There was some discussion about carrying extra forage, and when Captain Moylan and First Lieutenant Godfrey, commanders of troops A and K, suggested that the extra weight would break down the mules, Custer replied in an even more emphatic manner than usual:

“Well, gentlemen, you may carry what supplies you need, you will be held responsible for your companies. The extra forage was only a suggestion, but bear this fact in mind: we will follow the trail for fifteen days unless we catch them before that time expires, no matter how far it may take us from our base of supplies; we may not see the supply steamer again.”

The conference had broken up, and Custer was at the entrance to his tent now. Turning as he was about to enter, he concluded: “You had better carry along an extra supply of salt; we

may have to live on horse meat before we get through."

Entering his tent, he sat down at his camp desk and with a candle for a light, reread his written instructions, received an hour previously from General Terry.

CAMP AT THE MOUTH OF
ROSEBUD RIVER
June 22, 1876.

Lt. Col. Custer, 7th Cavalry:

COLONEL:

The Brigadier-General commanding directs that as soon as your regiment can be made ready for the march, you proceed up the Rosebud in pursuit of the Indians whose trail was discovered by Major Reno a few days ago. It is, of course, impossible to give you any definite instructions in regard to this movement, and were it not impossible to do so, the Department commander places too much confidence in your zeal, energy, and ability to wish to impose upon you precise orders, which might hamper your action when nearly in contact with the enemy.

He will, however, indicate to you his own

views of what your actions should be, and he desires that you should conform to them unless you shall see sufficient reason for departing from them. He thinks that you should proceed up the Rosebud until you ascertain definitely the direction in which the trail above spoken of, leads. Should it be found, as it appears to be almost certain that it will be found, to turn toward the Little Big Horn, he thinks that you should still proceed southward, perhaps as far as the headwaters of the Tongue, and then turn toward the Little Big Horn, feeling constantly however to your left, so as to preclude the possibility of the escape of the Indians to the south or southeast, by passing around your left flank.

The column of Col. Gibbon is now in motion for the mouth of the Big Horn. As soon as it reaches that point, it will cross the Yellowstone and move up at least as far as the forks of the Big and Little Horn. Of course, its future movements must be controlled by circumstances as they may arise; but it is hoped that the Indians, if upon the Little Big Horn, may be so nearly enclosed by the two columns, that their escape will be impossible.

The Department Commander desires

that on your way up the Rosebud you should thoroughly examine the upper part of Tullocks Creek, and that you should endeavor to send a scout through to Col. Gibbon's column with information of the result of your examination. The lower part of this creek will be examined by a detachment from Col. Gibbon's command.

The supply steamer will be pushed up the Big Horn as far as the forks of the river are found to be navigable for that space, and the Department Commander, who will accompany the column of Col. Gibbon, desires you to report to him there, not later than the expiration of the time for which your troops are rationed, unless in the meantime you receive further orders.

Respectfully

E. W. SMITH

Captain 18th Infantry,

Act. Asst. Adjt. Genl.

While Custer, alone in his tent, was planning the final details of his spear-head expedition, big things were happening on board the Far West in the skipper's cabin. Grant Marsh and Captain Crowell, of Gibbon's Sixth Infantry, were the hosts. Captain Tom Custer, the general's

brother, Lieutenant Calhoun, the general's brother-in-law, and Captain Keogh, picturesque Irish soldier of fortune—all of the Seventh Cavalry—were deep in their last great poker game. All night they played, and when at dawn the regimental bugler on shore blew reveille, the men pushed back their chairs from the table, and paid their losses in yellow bills and I.O.U.'s. Captain Crowell of the infantry won more than a thousand dollars that night, but the soldiers of the Seventh, who may have signed the I.O.U.'s, did not have to pay them—within a week death was to wipe the slate clean.

Since long before daybreak, the crew of the Far West had been discharging the supplies that were to be taken by mule-packs with Custer. Now, when reveille blew, the boxes and bags were piled upon the shore, ready for the civilian packers.

One of these was young Boston Custer, kid brother of the general. "Boss" had been spending the spring with the general, as had the general's seventeen-year-old nephew Autie Reed, who had accompanied the expedition under the nominal title of herder. This morning, Skipper

Marsh ran into the youngsters and stopped for a chat.

"Better stay with me, boys," he urged. "I'll fix you up with a cabin, and you'll have as much fun as if you trail along with the general. It will be a hard trip, better stick with us."

"Thanks, captain, believe we will," the boys assented.

Toward noon they came aboard, but shortly before the column marched off, they went ashore to get some tobacco. Mingling with the younger officers, eager and excited to be off on their first real campaign, the lure was too much for the lads. At the last moment they found mounts, and rode away.

Early in the morning, it had been announced that men would be dispatched to Fort Lincoln with mail immediately after the column moved. All the officers, and many of the men, found time to scribble a few lines to their families—the last many of them were ever to send.

With the letters collected in a mail-sack, a small rowboat was provisioned, and three soldiers were started down the river for Fort Buford. The men, however, knew little or nothing

about handling a boat, and in a second the treacherous Yellowstone current had caught up the skiff and overturned it. Before help could reach them, the three men were sucked under, swept down the stream, and drowned. All that afternoon the infantrymen dragged the river. The bodies were never recovered, but luckily the mail-pouch was hooked, the letters dried on the deck of the *Far West*, and late that evening, a second start undertaken by more experienced rivermen.

It was a bad omen for the beginning of a desperate campaign.

At noon, that same day, Custer with Generals Terry and Gibbon, stood on a little rise of ground back from the river, and reviewed the column as it trotted by. It was a splendid and experienced regiment; 635 enlisted men with thirty-one officers, twenty-five Ree and six Crow scouts, and five white scouts, including Charlie Reynolds, Frank Girard and George Herendeen, and three other civilians; Boston Custer, Autie Reed, and Frank Kellog—a daring and unusual newspaper man, sent at the last moment from his copy desk on the ambitious little Bismarck Her-

ald. Kellog, when death had cheated him of the unknown honor, was to be made famous as the accredited correspondent of the New York Herald. He had been a guest on the Far West on the journey up the Missouri and Yellowstone, from Bismarck opposite the Seventh's home station at Fort Lincoln; and for a few colorful days as a war correspondent in action, he was to play the thrilling part of his own hero.

The rear guard, trailing behind the 140 pack mules, had passed, and Custer turned to shake hands with his two old Civil War comrades.

"Don't be too greedy, now, Custer," Gibbon twitted him. "Save some Indians for us."

Custer shook his head with a smile. "No, I won't."

Then he gripped his commander's hand, turned to his horse held by his orderly, mounted, and galloped to the head of the long column.

CHAPTER NINE

THE regiment made twelve miles the afternoon of June 22, and at four o'clock went into camp. About sunset, Custer had officers' call sounded, and within a few minutes the men had gathered in his tent. It was a serious talk Custer gave; somehow, already a spirit of uneasiness, a feeling of impending tragedy, had spread over the whole outfit.

"Gentlemen, from now, there will be no more trumpet-calls except in the direst emergency," the general explained. "We shall march each morning at five sharp. Every troop commander here is an experienced and capable officer, and I am not going to bother you with the details of your troop management. All such things as the hour of reveille, stabling, grazing, etc., will be left entirely to your own judgment and discretion. Only two things will be regulated from headquarters—when to move, and when to go into camp. . . . I want the companies to keep within supporting distance of each other, and

well behind the advance scouts, and I want no straggling.

"There is no need for me to say more about these matters, because I have too much confidence in the judgment and loyalty of every officer present to stress minor details. . . . Now, as to the fighting we may have to do. From the report of Major Reno, it is probable we may be called on to face a thousand warriors, and it is possible there may be as many as fifteen hundred. From all available reports, and from what the Indian department told me in Washington a few weeks ago, I think this latter figure of fifteen hundred is certainly the maximum we can expect to face. And, gentlemen, I haven't the slightest doubt that we will be able to give them a first-rate thrashing. My only real fear is that they will elude us and escape to the south and west. . . .

"I am sure we are all proud that the Seventh is again together, and facing an active campaign. General Terry very kindly offered me the battalion from the Second Cavalry, and two Gatling guns, but I declined them. I feel they would only hamper our quick movement, and



CRAZY HORSE

we do not need them. The Seventh Cavalry, gentlemen, is a host in itself. . . .

"And, now in conclusion, I want to caution all troop officers to husband their animals and rations with the greatest care possible. We shall march between twenty-five and thirty miles a day, and it may be that we shall be out a good deal longer than we anticipate at this moment. I intend to follow the trail until we come up to the Indians, even if it takes us to the agencies on the Missouri River or in Nebraska. Thank you, gentlemen. . . ."

The officers trailed out of the tent into the night. This talk of Custer's was an unusual speech for him to make. He was not in the habit of taking his officers so fully into his confidence. His customary brusk, aggressive manner had given way to a subdued and friendly one. It was almost as if he were pleading for every officer, and especially his open enemies, Major Reno and Captain Benteen, to give unstinted loyalty and cooperation in the hours that were to come.

"Goddy, you know I think Custer believes he is going to be killed," Lieutenant Wallace re-

marked a few minutes later to Lieutenant Godfrey—today a retired, distinguished old general, whose spirit is as high, and whose cavalry mustaches are as long as they were this evening fifty-two years ago.

"Why do you think that, Wallace?" Godfrey asked.

"Because I've never heard Custer talk that way before," the young officer answered.

But if Custer had any such fear, he kept it to himself. At five to the dot, on the following morning, he swung into his saddle; and with two sergeant color-bearers—one carrying the regimental standard, and the other his old personal Third Cavalry Division flag—moved up the Rosebud at the head of the column. Far out on the flanks and in the front, the Indian and white scouts combed the ground for Indian signs.

Eight miles up the tiny stream, they passed the first of the series of Indian camping grounds that they were to march by during the course of the day. There could be no doubt that they were in the Indian country now. The whole command was on the *qui vive*, and Custer's trained eye followed down every clue.

At a little after five o'clock in the afternoon, Custer ordered camp to be made. The regiment had covered thirty-three miles that day. Excitement was high, and the men were told to get as much sleep as possible, for none knew what the next day might bring.

Promptly at five the next morning, the regiment was again in the saddle, the scouts, ahead and on the flanks, going over every inch of the ground for signs of recent pony tracks and fresh droppings. Toward noon, the column came up to a great camping ground, where the frame of a sun-dance lodge stood, shining in the sunlight like the bleached ribs of a buffalo carcass.

Here Custer assembled the officers and told them that his scouts had just reported finding fresh tracks of three or four ponies, and of an Indian on foot, hurrying, no doubt, to join the hostiles. The command would follow as fast as the scouts could point the way.

Slowly, the column trudged up the narrow river valley. The marks of lodge-poles, pony tracks and the whole moving village, were constantly in evidence. Custer luck was again smiling down on the Seventh.

By early afternoon, twenty-eight miles had been covered, and the command was ordered to halt, and supper cooked; but the fires were to be put out as soon as possible. The regiment was to be in readiness to march at 11:30 that night. At 9:30, when darkness had fallen, scouts came to Custer with additional information. The general called his orderlies:

"Present my compliments to all the various officers, and ask them to report here at once."

In less than five minutes, the officers had assembled, and in the darkness the general addressed them, this time in quick, decisive tones.

"Gentlemen, the scouts report that the trail leads to the west toward the Little Bighorn. The march must be taken up at once. We must get as near the divide before daybreak as is humanly possible. We shall conceal ourselves in some wooded ravine during the day, reconnoiter the country as thoroughly as possible, and attack their village at daybreak on the 26th. I want to warn you against any unnecessary noise on the part of your commands. We shall move as soon as you rejoin your companies. . . ."

In the black night the column moved out,

each troop keeping the trail only by the sound of the clanking accouterments of the troop immediately ahead. It was difficult and dangerous work; and at two o'clock that night, after they had covered some ten miles, Custer ordered a halt.

Lieutenant Varnum, who had been almost constantly in the saddle for the last forty-eight hours, was sent with his Indian scouts to the highest point of ground on the divide, called Crow's Nest, with orders to report back as soon as day broke.

When the pink in the east had spread gently to the western horizon, and then changed to the gray and white of early dawn, Varnum and his scouts peered anxiously toward the west, across the miles of rough and wrinkled lands that led to the deep-cut valley of the Little Bighorn. There, some fifteen miles away, could be seen smoke rising from an Indian village, and the dust from a vast pony herd. Immediately, Varnum dispatched a messenger to his commander.

Without waiting to have his horse saddled, Custer vaulted on his back, and made the rounds of the different company commanders.

"The scouts have discovered the village to the west," he explained. "We shall march at once and go into hiding early in the forenoon."

Back at his temporary bivouac, Custer, squatting in the circle with his scouts, listened half abstractedly to the slow translation of their reports. Suddenly, while Bloody Knife, one of his best Crow scouts, was talking, Custer turned to the interpreter, and nervously demanded, "What's that he is saying?"

"He says we'll find enough Sioux to keep us fighting two or three days," the interpreter answered.

The general shrugged his shoulders and remarked, "I guess we'll get through them in one day, all right."

With the powwow over, Custer mounted and led off the column. At 10:30, after marching ten miles, he called a halt in a deep ravine and ordered the regiment to keep well hidden. Immediately he galloped off to the Crow's Nest to make a personal observation.

By the time he had reached the high point, the sun was blazing down from almost straight overhead, and the thin air made visibility difficult.

Even with field-glasses, Custer failed to locate the exact point of the village, but he took his scouts' word that they had positively seen the villages in the early morning light.

Returning to the ravine, where the troops were now resting, Custer felt that if his luck held out he could keep concealed during the day, move forward in the night, and launch his surprise attack at dawn on the 26th.

But his luck did not hold out.

As soon as the halt was called, Tom Custer came up with a report that a box of hard bread had been lost from one of Captain Keogh's pack mules, and that Sergeant Curtis in going back down the trail in search of it, had found three Indians trying to open it. The hostiles, upon his approach, had mounted their ponies and ridden slowly away. There was no doubt now, but that the column had been discovered.

Almost at the same moment that Tom Custer brought this bad news, scouts galloped in and reported that they had seen mounted Indians moving along the ridge that bordered the narrow valley the troops had just marched down, observing their movements.

Custer at once ordered his bugler to sound officers' call—there was no need now for further secrecy. When the officers had collected, he informed them that the command had been discovered, and that the only thing to do now was to push ahead as rapidly as possible and attack the village in the daytime, before the Indians could pack up and flee.

"We shall move out at once, gentlemen," he concluded. "You will inspect your companies, report immediately, and your place in the line of march will be according to the order of your reports."

Within ten minutes, the command was moving at as rapid a gait as was possible on the rough trail that led over the divide between the Rosebud and the Little Bighorn.

At 12:07, Custer ordered the regiment to halt, and he and his adjutant—the brave Canadian-born adventurer Lieutenant Cook—drew off a little to one side, and on a scrap of paper, divided the regiment into three battalions, with a fourth unit to act as rear guard.

To Major Reno—who had for three days been chafing under the fancied insult that Custer was

degrading his rank by giving him nothing to do—was assigned the advance battalion, consisting of Troop M, Captain French; Troop A, Captain Moylan and Lieutenant de Rudio; Troop G, Lieutenants McIntosh and Wallace; the Indian scouts under Lieutenant Varnum, and Hale and the white scout Charlie Reynolds and the interpreter Frank Girard; Lieutenant Benny Hodgson was assigned as acting adjutant, and doctors de Wolf and Porter as medical officers.

Under the brave, but bitter Captain Benteen, senior captain and third ranking officer of the regiment, were placed Troop H, Lieutenant Gibbon; Troop D, Captain Weir and Lieutenant Edgerly; and Troop K, Lieutenant Godfrey. To the pack-train, under charge of Lieutenant Mathey, each troop had assigned one non-commissioned officer and six privates; and with this and Troop B, the pack-train guard under Captain McDougall, were left a number of men whose horses were otherwise unfit for hard service. Probably in the whole of this rear command, there were no less than 150 armed and mounted troopers.

General Custer himself kept the remaining

five troops under his immediate command. They consisted of Troop I, Captain Keogh and Lieutenant Porter; Troop F, Captain Yates and Lieutenant Reilly; Troop C, Captain Custer and Lieutenant Harrington; Troop E, Lieutenants Smith and Sturgis; Troop L, Lieutenants Calhoun and Crittenden; and Doctor G. E. Lord. With Custer also rode his young brother and nephew and Kellog, the intrepid newspaper correspondent.

They were headed straight into action. Somewhere, a dozen miles or so to the westward, was the Indian village they were to attack and destroy. None could tell just where it was, how far it stretched up and down the little Greasy Grass, as the Indians called the Little Bighorn.

With such meager information as was his, Custer could lay out no definite plan. At best, he could but feel for the enemy until he was accurately located and then hit him as hard as possible.

It was natural to suppose that the hostile scouts who had discovered the soldier column were now galloping toward their village, and warning the chiefs of the approach of the "long

swords." If they ran true to form, they would immediately strike their teepees, gather together such household necessities as they could, and start a rapid flight either to the south or the west—or even to the north, into the waiting arms of Gibbon's column, now marching southward to the junction of the Bighorn and Little Bighorn.

Thinking clearly and swiftly, Custer laid out his plan of campaign; his battle plan would necessarily have to be formed later when he made contact with the enemy. Benteen and his three troops would bear off toward the left on the scout, but with positive instructions to pitch into any Indians they met. If possible, Benteen was to follow obliquely to the left until he struck the valley of the Little Bighorn. He would be the southern wing, which would sweep back any fleeing Indians; and so uncertain was the formation as to the exact position of the village that it was possible Benteen might even strike the upper or southern end of the Indian encampment.

If he failed to reach the river valley, or if for any reason he found that it was inadvisable

to continue on his scout, he was to return to the main trail and follow the column.

At the head of his three troops, comprising approximately 140 men, Benteen now swerved off toward the left and at a walk or trot, according as the rough hilly country would permit, started to carry out his orders.

Ordering Reno and his three troops to take the left bank of the narrow creek bottom they were now following, Custer and his own five troops pushed ahead on the right bank.

For a distance of seven or eight miles, the two squadrons trotted on, now close together, now some distance apart. In the van, Custer's scout had seen and set fire to an Indian teepee containing the body of the brother of Chief Circling Bear, a warrior of some importance who had been killed in the battle with General Cook, only forty miles away, eight days before. No word of this army disaster had reached Custer.

At the same moment that the burning teepee was approached, interpreter Girard, riding to a high knoll near by and sighting a small band of hostiles, shouted down to Custer: "Here are your Indians, running like devils."

Custer, motioning with his hat for Reno to come toward him, at once turned to his adjutant: "Cook, order Major Reno to take as fast a trot as he deems prudent, charge the village, and the whole outfit will support him."

Cook rode toward Major Reno and repeated the order. Reno at once led his three troops and the scouts—about 170 men in all—at a fast trot down the trail toward the river ford, still some two miles to the westward.

For a few hundred yards Custer followed with his five troops—192 enlisted men, thirteen officers, four Indian scouts, one civilian scout and three additional civilians—in all less than one-third the strength of regiment then in the field. When within a little more than a mile from the river ford, he swung off to the rolling ground to the north, galloping up the high bluffs and following them down-stream.

Riding briskly on down-stream toward the north for almost two miles, Custer, spurring ahead with his own bugler, and possibly a scout or two, now approached a bluff that gave a view of a considerable sweep of the valley across the river below them. From here, they could see at

least the southern end of the Indian village, and catch glimpses of Reno's mounted men charging toward the village. There was some firing and a number of Indians in sight.

From a hurried glance, it was evident that the village had *not* as yet broken camp. By striking farther down-stream, while Reno was charging from the upper southern end, they might still scoop up the whole village. It was Custer luck again.

He waved his hat and shouted, "We've got them this time, boys!"

In a half-minute the troopers could look down into the valley, themselves, and eagerly they set up a cheer. Several of the horses became unmanageable and Custer called out: "Hold your horses in, boys; they're plenty of them down there for all of us!"

Riding alongside of his brother Captain Tom Custer, he ordered: "Send one of your men to hurry up the ammunition packs, and to tell Ben-teen to come on."

Tom Custer motioned a trusted sergeant, Dan Kanipe, to come to him. "Go to Captain McDougall; tell him to hurry the pack train straight

across the country. If any packs come loose, cut them and come on quick—a big Indian camp. . . . And if you see Captain Benteen, tell him to come quick—a big Indian camp.”

Kanipe saluted and galloped back over the trail he had just followed. Some five or six miles back he passed Benteen, now on the main trail, gave him the message and then hurried on to the pack-train a half-mile to the rear.

Custer and his troopers, now moving northward on the high ground as fast as the wrinkled terrain would permit, almost immediately lost sight of the village below, and of Reno's charging men. These bluffs to the east of the stream that they were riding over, were high, rugged, and badly cut up with narrow draws and water-courses. Only in two or three places on northward from the ford where Reno had crossed, could men on horseback reach the Little Big-horn and cross it. The first of these, Ford B, lay some four miles north of Reno's crossing, and the second, roughly a mile and a half to the north of this Ford B.

Custer and his 192 troopers were now rapidly approaching a deep cut that ran down into a

wide ravine—leading, three-quarters of a mile to the westward, into the river and this Ford B. The valley below, across the Little Bighorn—a tortuous little stream about one hundred feet wide, and at this time of year three or four feet deep—led up gently from the river bottom, with its fringe of cottonwoods and aspens, and averaged almost a half-mile in width before it touched the low, rolling plateau to the west.

Stretched along for about three miles in this valley, on the west bank of the stream, were pitched the several Indian camps, comprising five bands of the Sioux nation, and small bands of the Northern Cheyennes and Arapahoes. At the southern end of the village, where Reno was now charging, were camped a few families of Blackfeet; and next came the teepees of the powerful Hunckpapa Sioux, whose medicine-man Sitting Bull was the leading spirit of all the great camp, and whose war chief Gall was a capable and talented fighting leader.

In all, there were probably twice as many warriors assembled here as General Terry, Gibbon, and Custer had figured on. Estimates made after the battle were as much too high as those made before the battle were too low. In all

probability between eighteen hundred and two thousand Indian warriors took part in the fighting. Of this number, about half were armed with modern rifles—repeating Winchesters they unwisely had been permitted to purchase from civilian traders at the different agencies. For months, they had been hoarding a supply of ammunition, and they had no trouble on this point during the fighting. The remaining half of the warriors were armed with bows and arrows, and other primitive weapons—and, later in the day, with the army carbines they found on the battlefield.

Riding swiftly to right and left, searching every second for fresh intelligence concerning the difficult country, Custer, with two or three men at his side, led the way in the deep ravine that bore off toward the west, and three-quarters of a mile further on debouched itself into the river at Ford B.

He was convinced now that there would be fighting to do, and plenty of it. Movement in the Indian village, of which he had still seen less than half, led him to believe the squaws were breaking camp and ready to flee.

By smashing them on the flank, or near the

lower end of the village, he would throw them into complete disorder, at the same time giving the greatest possible assistance and support to Major Reno, now attacking the village at its upper, southern end, with his three troops.

Instantly, his plan of action was formed. He would bring Benteen and his three troops up at once, throw them into action with, or near him, and the jig would be up.

To split a command and strike in several spots at once was the recognized, and only recognized, method of successful Indian-fighting. In the most spectacular defeat the plains Indians had ever suffered at the hands of white soldiers (Custer's own victory on the Washita in the Indian Territory eight years before) he had divided his troops in just such a manner and carried out a surprise attack that was a complete success.

Custer now turned to his trumpeter orderly, who had been assigned to him that morning from Captain Benteen's own troop. He was an Italian boy of twenty-five, named Martini, and, as a lad of fourteen, he had been a drummer-boy with Garibaldi. At twenty-two, he had migrated to America, and, within a few months,

enlisted in the Seventh Cavalry. He had ridden with Custer in the epic scout into the Black Hills two years previously, but this was his first real Indian fight.

Custer motioned the trumpeter to him. "Orderly, I want you to take a message to Captain Benteen. Ride as fast as you can and tell him to hurry. Tell him it's a big village, and I want him to be quick, and to bring the ammunition packs."

The little bugler saluted, answered, "Yes, sir!" and started to turn his horse, when Lieutenant Cook, the adjutant, checked him.

"Wait, orderly, I'll give you a message," Cook ordered, pulling up his horse, and without dismounting, he scribbled in his notebook and tore out the sheet and handed it to the boy. His message read:

"Benteen, come on—big village—be quick—bring packs. P. bring pac's. W. W. Cook."

"Now, orderly, ride as fast as you can to Captain Benteen," Cook concluded. "Take the same trail we came down. If you have time and there is no danger, come back, but otherwise stay with your company."

Martini turned his horse and spurred him into a gallop. He was the last surviving white man to see Custer alive. When he turned back up the hill, Custer was heading down the gap into the wide coulée that led off to the west toward the river. The troops, in columns of fours, were following him, the gray-horse troop of Smith's in the center.

A half-mile back down the trail from where he had caught the last glimpse of Custer, he met young Boston Custer riding at a run toward the column.

"Where's the general?" the boy shouted.

Martini pointed in the direction from which he had just come, and then continued at a gallop in the opposite direction. Boston had left the outfit some time before, hurried back to the pack-train, procured a fresh mount, and was now galloping toward the general and certain death.

Before Martini reached the high hill, where Custer had first looked down into the village on the opposite side of the river, he caught sight of Indians and heard firing. It flashed through his mind that Custer would soon be fighting.

Galloping along on the crest of the hill, he could see Reno still fighting in the valley below. He wanted to wait and enjoy the stirring drama, but he had been told to hurry, and he urged his tired horse into a lope. Soon, however, his horse slowed down, and it was all he could do to keep him at a trot.

At a spot on the trail leading eastward, about a mile from where Custer and Reno had parted, and about three miles from the Reno ford, Martini saw Benteen riding a hundred yards or so in front of his troops. He spurred his horse, but the animal could not be beaten out of a slow trot.

When he met Benteen, he saluted, handed him the message and told him what the general had said.

"Where's the general now?" Benteen demanded.

"I guess he's charging the village across the river, four or five miles that way from here," the boy answered in broken English, pointing to the north.

"What's the matter with your horse?" Benteen questioned.

"Just tired out, I guess," the bugler replied.

"Tired out," Benteen grunted. "Look at his flank."

The boy turned in his saddle and saw blood running from a bullet wound in his mount.

"You're lucky it was the horse and not you that was hit," Benteen remarked. "Well, fall in with your troop."

Although the leading mules of the pack-train were now in sight, and Benteen had in his pocket a written order from his commanding officer to "come on—big village—be quick—bring packs," and a hurried postscript, "P. bring pac's," he did not deem it necessary to send men back to hurry up the ammunition mules.

"Packs" meant only one thing in frontier army life at this time—ammunition packs. It did not mean the hardtack or the bacon or coffee—it meant priceless, life-preserving ammunition. The twelve strongest mules of the entire 140 of the command had been carefully picked out, equipped with Spanish aparajos and each were transporting two thousand rounds of rifle ammunition. These mules could travel almost as fast as an ordinary cavalry mount. They were

strong, and they carried no more weight than a good-sized trooper.

To have sent back men, cut out a half-dozen of the lead ammunition mules, sent them at a gallop after his own column, would not have taken a man of Benteen's ability and power more than a very few minutes.

Benteen, however, did not send back any word to the pack-train, but trotted along, believing quite possibly that Sergeant Kanipe, who had given him Custer's message some twenty minutes before and then reported on back to the pack-train, was all that was needed to hurry along the mules.

For some minutes, firing had been heard off toward the northwest, near the river. Benteen was pointing that way now. After he had left Custer over an hour before, and swung off to the left, he had gone but three or four miles before he had encountered steep, difficult hills, cut with dangerous watercourses. Looking on toward the west and the southwest, he could see nothing but a succession of these hills.

Custer had told him to swing back to the main trail, and follow the other column, if he

found it inadvisable to go on farther with his scout. This he consequently had done, and at a morass near the main trail had stopped to water his tired and thirsty mounts. That had been some minutes before the first messenger, Sergeant Kanipe, had arrived.

Even here at the morass, faint sounds of firing could be heard off toward the river. Either Reno or Custer had already struck the redskins. Both Captain Weir and Lieutenant Godfrey—who was slightly deaf—had heard this firing and reported it to Benteen. Still Benteen made no effort to push forward rapidly.

Finally, Captain Weir—brave old Michigan cavalryman who had in the years of the Civil War been trained to march to the sound of the guns—mounted his troop and rode toward the firing. Benteen followed.

As they left the water-hole, the first of the ammunition mules were coming up, and, crowding and pushing into the morass, a number of them bogged down.

It was soon after leaving this water-hole that Sergeant Kanipe was encountered and then a few minutes later, near the burning teepee, the Italian bugler on his wounded horse was met with.

The firing could be heard more distinctly now. Benteen swung his three troops into squadron front, ordered the men to draw their pistols, and the whole outfit pushed forward at a gallop to meet what they supposed were retreating Indians.

Nearing the point on the main trail where Custer had swung off to the right, or north, Benteen met several Ree scouts fleeing from the battle-field across the river, and driving a small herd of captured Sioux ponies in front of them.

"Soldiers!" they shouted, pointing to the north toward a high bluff that looked down into the valley.

Benteen took the hill at a fast pace. In the distance, he could see his comrades, some mounted, others dismounted. He made straight for them.

While Benteen had been swinging off to his left and wallowing over the steep hill-lands, Reno and his three troops, and his twenty-five Ree scouts had followed straight westward down the main trail. Custer, riding behind them, had swung off to the north when about a mile from the ford. At the river, Reno pulled up for a few

minutes, let his horses drink, and reformed his column and gave his orders.

Across the ford on the west bank of the Little Bighorn, the river valley stretched out in a level plain for about a half-mile, before it lost itself in the gentle hills to the west. The river course was very winding, and at the bends clumps of cottonwoods would often obscure the view down the valley to the north. Less than two miles in front of Reno now, as he swung his column to the right and galloped northward, was a heavy growth of trees that all but hid the teepees of the Indian village, stretching another three miles down the valley.

A few Indians were in front of him but they fled as his men galloped on. The Ree scouts were on his left, next the western hills, and he had two troops abreast, and the third in the rear in reserve.

Rounding the wooded elbow of the river, Reno now ordered the reserve troop up, and swung his whole force of some 170 soldiers and scouts in skirmish formation, reaching across the entire valley.

He could see hundreds of teepees stretched out

in front of him now, and a moving mass of mounted and unmounted warriors facing him. Firing was going on, but neither his nor the Indians' aim could be accurate against moving opponents.

It was certain his charge had been a surprise. The Indians' own scouts had been following Custer's northward march on the bluffs, and they had no realization that there was still another force threatening them. Hurriedly, hundreds of the Indians waiting down-stream to attack Custer were sent for to check this surprise charge at the south end of this village. Whatever happened, they would protect their squaws and children to the last.

Halting his men, Reno ordered them to dismount, and each fourth trooper to lead the horses of his "four" back into the woods. Slowly, the dismounted men marched toward the tip of the village, firing as they came on.

Almost synchronizing with the dismounted attack, a body of mounted and naked warriors swung around the low, rolling country to the west, and then cut in on Reno's left flank. Instantly, the twenty-five Ree scouts broke and

ran, making it possible for the warriors to sweep in on Reno's left and rear.

Reno at once ordered his men to fall back to the protecting woods, on whose outer edge ran a cut bank that offered a natural and number one defensive position.

Reno had been ordered by Custer to charge the village, and this retiring movement to the woods has been the subject of much bitter comment against his judgment and bravery. Doubtless, and possibly quite rightly so, he felt he was being drawn into a trap where the vastly superior numbers of the Indians could overwhelm him.

Up to the moment of taking shelter in the woods, he had had but one man hit. The horses of two troopers had become unmanageable and had broken straight for the Indian lines, but they had both circled back and joined up with the rest of the men.

Here in the woods he was, in a very few minutes, almost completely surrounded by hostiles, but he had a three-foot cut bank along two sides, and heavy cottonwoods in the rear for protection. There is little question but that he could have held out here for hours, against almost any number of Indians.

Perturbed at the non-appearance of Custer, who had told him that "the whole outfit will support you"—which support Custer was about effectively to give by attacking the Indian village on its flank farther to the north and across the river—Reno completely lost his head. It was his first Indian fight. He had only hate and prejudice against Custer. He felt now that Custer, by not coming up immediately in his rear, had failed him.

Bloody Knife, a half-breed scout, standing close beside him, suddenly cried out and threw up his hands, and his brains spattered in Reno's face.

Firing was going on all around, and instead of calmly placing his men on the defense—where they could still be on the offense by being able to pour a deadly fire into the upper end of the village, and thus keep occupied a large proportion of the warriors—Reno, now unnerved and with all mastery of himself or his command gone, ordered his men to mount.

Immediately, he countermanded his order. Then, almost in the same breath, again ordered them to mount and charge for the hills to the southeast on the opposite side of the river.

This was his fatal mistake. A number of the men did not hear his order, and those who did mount had no time to form in regular troop formation before the mad rout across the valley and toward the river began, Reno leading the way.

Indians, racing to their front, cut them off from the way they had come less than an hour before, and the frightened troopers were now forced by the pressure of the attacking hostiles, to head toward the east across the river, and up a narrow defile, so steep and dangerous that horses without the excitement of battle, could never have climbed its precipitous banks.

Counting the two or three killed in the timbers, Reno lost twenty-nine men in this flight. Back in the woods that Reno had just left, George Herendeen, an able old frontiersman, found himself with thirteen troopers. Separated in another section, was a single trooper with Lieutenant de Rudio, a French soldier of fortune who some years before had been jailed in Paris for a share in a plot to assassinate Napoleon III.

So heavy were the underbrush and trees that these two groups were able to remain in safety,

unobserved by the hostiles, busy now in chasing Reno's men across the river, and in killing the wounded troopers lying in the valley.

Within a little more than a half-hour, Herendeen and his thirteen men boldly left their hiding, walked across the valley and the ford, encountering but a single group of five Indians whom they drove off without difficulty; and joined Reno's forces on the high bluff across the river. De Rudio and his companion hid up-stream that night, and did not join Reno until twenty-four hours later.

Reno and the first of his men had now scrambled up the high banks of the Greasy Grass, where the younger officers were trying desperately to regain some sort of discipline, and form a defensive skirmish line for the expected attack. The wild leap from the bank into the river; the race across the ford, and the dash up the steep banks had been a blood-curdling experience. . . . The horse of Lieutenant Hodgson—the favorite junior of the regiment—had leaped into the river and fallen dead; Hodgson, shot in the leg and unhorsed, shouted, "For God's sake, don't leave me!" A trooper stopped his horse, tried to pull

the young officer up behind him, but failing, screamed for him to grab his stirrup strap and he would get him over the river. When he reached the bank across the stream, a second bullet shot him dead.

Here on the knoll of the hill, the ninety men left of Reno's three troops, waited for the hostiles to form and charge them. Suddenly, they saw Benteen's men galloping toward them with drawn pistols.

Reno, wild-eyed and unstrung, with hat gone and a handkerchief tied around his head, hurried up to the cool, gray-haired Benteen.

"For God's sake, Benteen, halt your command and help me," he stammered excitedly. "I've lost half my men."

In a glance, Benteen took in the situation. Little groups of Indians, three or four hundred yards away, were firing into the men on the hill. He ordered his men to dismount and form as skirmishers, and the led horses to be taken to a small ravine. From their reserve ammunition in their saddle-bags, his men now replenished the belts of Reno's men, many of whom had exhausted most of their supply.

A charge was expected, but within a very few minutes it was evident that the Indians were retreating. Now only an odd bullet or two sang its way toward the hills.

But northward, down the river, firing could be heard.

The troopers looked at one another and muttered, "That must be Custer."

Standing apart from the others, Reno and Benteen were conversing. Reno was a major and the senior officer of the two. Benteen showed him the order from Custer—"Benteen, come on—big village—be quick—bring packs. P. bring pac's. W. W. Cook."

Both of these men were old soldiers. Reno had been the colonel of a Pennsylvania cavalry regiment the last year of the Civil War. Benteen, too, had had his own regiment, and was recognized as one of the bravest men in the army. They knew orders, they knew the tradition of the service. They knew Custer was having a hard fight down the river. But they only strode up and down their lines, with no Indians in sight, swearing and damning.

After a time, Reno ordered young Lieutenant

Hare, whom he had made his active adjutant, to take the best horse available and hurry after the ammunition packs.

In a matter of minutes, two sturdy mules trotted up, bearing four thousand rounds of extra rifle ammunition.

The firing was heavier than ever down the river now. Custer was having a stiff fight.

It couldn't be anyone but Custer. And certainly he must be pressed hard, with less than one-third of the regiment with him.

Here with the unnerved Reno, and the fearless Benteen, were Benteen's full three troops—numbering 140 men—and the 90 effective men and 7 wounded of Reno's three troops. And down the river, Custer with 192 troopers, was fighting what these two men knew to be vastly superior numbers of Indians.

All the ammunition mules had come up by this time, and the others were dribbling in. With the pack mules were no less than ninety armed and mounted troopers, and in Captain McDougall's rear guard were forty to fifty more men. This number could easily take care of the mule-train and the injured. Reno and Benteen, with

the 230 effective men of their own troops, taking along at a gallop five or six of the fastest ammunition mules, could form a flying wedge that could strike the hostiles a blow on the flank that would dismay them, and unquestionably relieve the pressure on Custer.

The sound of the firing still drifted down from the north. From one point on the hill here, men with glasses could even see the swirling cloud of smoke and dust rising from what no doubt was the battlefield, three miles to the north.

Here, on Reno's hill, there were no Indians to fight now. Men had gone down the river-bank for water, and Reno had first sent men, and then gone himself, to locate the body of Hodgson.

But, if there was no fighting to be done here, there was desperate need for help down the river. And Benteen was one of the bravest men in the army. He was ranked by the paralyzed Reno, yet in his pocket was the order from the commander of the regiment to "Come on—be quick." But hate had done its work.

The one thing that would help now was a fearless, dashing charge. Military history is crowded with tales of just such heroic, and often

futile acts—the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava, the reeling assault of the Irish brigade at Marye's Heights, the gray-clad sweep of Pickett's men at Gettysburg.

"Why don't we go to Custer?" sergeants grumbled and swore under their breath.

"What are we waitin' here for, like a lot of scared pack mules?" another spoke.

Captain Weir, he who had always marched to the sound of guns, strode up to Reno. Why didn't they move to the fighting? Custer would need help. Weren't they going soon?

Flushed and angry at the evasive answers, Weir and his orderly mounted and rode off toward the firing. His second in command, young Lieutenant Edgerly, ordered the troop to follow along.

It was after five o'clock. The last of the straggling mules, and the rear guard had come up. No less than 375 effective men, and 24,000 rounds of rifle ammunition, were on hand. Custer in all had only 192 troopers, and here, three miles away, were almost twice the number of effectives.

The firing came fainter now. Slowly, as a snail might crawl over the rolling hills, Reno took up

the march northward. For a half-mile, possibly three-quarters, the column wound its way.

Suddenly, there was firing close at hand, and then over the brow of the hills, Indians on horseback came charging on, lighted by the fire of exultation. They neared Reno's advance troops, and he ordered the column to fall back to its original position on the hilltop to the south.

From the north, and from the hills to the east, hundreds of redskins appeared now. They were sweeping down on the troopers in a wild charge.

While Reno fled back to his position, Lieutenant Godfrey coolly dismounted his company, sent the led horses to the rear, threw his men out in skirmish-line and drove back the attacking Sioux. Foot by foot, the men drew back; and now near Reno's defensive hilltop they gave way and reached the position in safety. Save for this skillful rear-guard action, there might have been another serious disaster.

But no longer did the accusing sound of firing float down from the high ground to the north. . . .

CHAPTER TEN

IT was about two o'clock on this sweltering Sunday afternoon of June 25, when Custer sent back his Italian bugler with his hurry-up message to Benteen. A half-mile farther on, he led his troops down a narrow defile into the wide ravine that debouched towards the west into the river ford.

Already he had been fired on several times, but it had only excited the horses and keyed up the men to the work at hand. From the varying points the scattered shots had come from, he doubtless thought that some of the Indians had crossed the river to the north, and were now on his side of the stream in considerable force. He could not understand how this could be, if Reno had carried out his orders and pitched into the village at its southern end some three miles away.

But already Reno had retreated back across the river, and the warriors were now returning to throw their undivided weight on Custer. If Reno had stubbornly held his position in the

woods near the end of the Indian camp, at least half the braves would have remained there to protect their squaws and children. But Reno had fled, and now they could hurry back in full strength and overwhelm "Long Hair" himself.

Ordering a small force to gallop toward the river ford three-quarters of a mile to the west, Custer carefully surveyed the ground. Should he cross here or go on farther and strike the village at its northern tip, and possibly send Benteen down this ravine, to hit the village in the middle?

A minute later, the decision was taken out of his hands. Troopers, spurring their horses, galloped up and reported that many Indians were coming across the ford, and that they were in ambush in the ravine on his side of the Little Bighorn.

There was firing into his men from several directions now. It would be ticklish business to take the men down this narrow ravine, cut with watercourses and tiny coulées, which would afford splendid protection for the hostiles to pour a deadly fire into his troops.

On to the north there was high ground. He

would draw the Indians from their ambush and bring them out in the open. There he could handle them promptly and efficiently, and at the same time be visible to Benteen and the packs coming up from the south. With Reno pressing his attack, and with Benteen coming up in a few minutes, he would have the battle well in hand.

The Indians were crowding him pretty hard as he crossed the ravine and started up the sloping hill to the north.

"Dismount your men and throw out a skirmish-line!" he shouted to his brother-in-law Calhoun.

A half-mile to the north, the knob of a high hill would afford a splendid position for fighting, with a field of fire apparently sweeping down from all sides. Here, too, he would have a point of observation and an ideal position from which to direct all the fighting.

With four troops he started for this knob. But heavy firing was pouring in from two sides, the west and the south.

"Dismount your troops, and fight them as skirmishers!" he ordered Captain Keogh.

A little farther on, he ordered Smith to spread his men out as skirmishers from Keogh's flank up toward the knob of the hill.

There was heavy firing from three sides now. A quarter of a mile to the south, where Calhoun's men were stationed, he could hear war-whoops and increased firing. A swirling cloud of dust cut off the view. Apparently the Indians had swung in on three sides and were charging.

He ordered his brother Tom and Captain Yates to take their troops to the knob of the hill and send skirmishers along the ridge to the left, toward the river.

Why didn't Benteen show up?

The Indians were crowding up closer now from the south.

They had swept over Calhoun!

They were charging Keogh now. There were hundreds of them.

Not far from the knob of the hill, his horse crumpled under him. Running on foot, he hurried toward the hilltop, the commanding position.

A glance behind showed him the Indians were coming closer.

They had swept over Keogh, too.

Where was Benteen? What had happened to Reno?

On the knob of the hill, Tom Custer, his beloved brother, pointed down a deep coulée. It curled its way like a hidden snake up the north slope, and emptied close to the crown of the hill that from below had looked to be such an admirable position for defense. A naked horde was creeping up this coulée now.

Carefully and thoughtfully, the two Custers placed their men to meet the charge.

Smith's men already had been pushed back toward the little group here on the hilltop. To the west, the thin line of skirmishers, tried-and-true old soldiers, were giving their lives to protect this flank.

God! If Benteen would only come!

Where could he be? There was no use now trying to get through another message to him. He had seen good old Sergeant Butler, whose fighting went back as far as the Crimean War, start off with his last hurry-up order, only to be shot down and scalped before his eyes.

But one desperate chance to send a last call for help now remained—slow, deliberate volley fir-

The Last Stand



ing. It would be a final signal of distress that would carry the appeal for miles.

Calmly, Custer ordered the little group about him to cease firing.

Then by regulation orders came the sharp command: "Load, aim, fire! . . . Load, aim, fire!"

The thirty rifles roared their message in unison.

Help would come now—brave old Benteen would answer this.

Yelling their chilling whoops, the Indians charged again. Already those on the hill had shot their horses and were using them as breastworks. Quickly and coolly, they drove back the charge.

Everywhere was blinding dust and the choking odor of powder, and all about the cries of dying men and the groans of wounded horses.

The skirmish-line to the left had been crumpled up. The soldiers of Keogh's, and Calhoun's, and Smith's had died like the brave men they were.

Eagerly, Custer strained his eyes and ears to catch some glimpse or sound of help, but none came from the hidden slope to the south.

There was still time—there was still hope.

Again the Indians charged, but this time they were driven back only by the smallest margin.

Custer gripped his pistol butts and calmly looked about him.

He knew now his doom had overtaken him. Custer luck, the thing that had carried him across a hundred battle-fields, had left him at last.

The little group settled behind their dead horses. Custer stood up and took a quick glance. They were coming again—they were forming for the charge.

The shadows of death were closing in. The little circle of men tightened. Their beloved leader, standing fearless in their center, took one last swift glance to the south. Then, quietly, he spoke to them. All hope was gone now. This would be his last stand.

The Indians were sweeping in from all sides; hundreds of yelping, firing, charging painted demons . . . Blinding dust—piercing whoops—death cries—flashing hoofs . . .

Twilight came on, the twilight of the high rolling land of the north.

Then night fell.

Stars came out.

A coyote off to the east toward the Rosebud howled, and on the ridge below a hungry mate sent back its moaning answer.

The stripped and naked men lying on the hillside did not hear them.

Down in the valley across the swiftly flowing Little Bighorn, great bonfires were sending high their sparks; tom-toms were throbbing; braves were dancing weird and awful rhythms.

These men here on the hill did not see them.

It grew cold—even on this Sunday night in June. Living men would need covering.

But these men lying on the hillside did not feel the cold. Naked though they were, they had no need for army blankets.

They were heroes.

They were soldiers who had fulfilled their great destiny—to die fighting.

They had been to war—war the eternal, that makes men's eyes bright with the dreams and memory of the struggling race.

War—brutal and beautiful—stupid and sublime.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LATE on that afternoon, the squaws and the children had stripped the clothes from, and mutilated more than half of the bodies of Custer's men, while the warriors had turned their ponies from the field to the retreating column of Reno's troops.

For three hours, until darkness brought relief, the hostiles attacked Reno's position on the hill; and with the first pink streak of dawn the entrenched soldiers gripped their rifles in readiness for the new attack.

Two shots rang out, and at the signal the firing was taken up on all sides.

All that morning the Indians blazed into the men on the hill. Toward noon, the firing slackened, and by two that afternoon, the attack had all but ceased.

Two hours later, Indians in the valley below were seen to be setting fire to the grass, and for a time the heavy smoke obscured the view of what was taking place. At five that evening,

toward the southward, up the valley of the Little Bighorn, the long column of the retreating Indians stretched for several miles. They were heading for the Bighorn Mountains. They had made their last hopeless stand against the conquering, relentless whites.

With the last hostile gone, Reno and Benteen still made no move. Custer apparently had been defeated and had fled toward the column led by Terry and Gibbon, now coming up the river valley from the north. They had only scorn for him—those two who hated him. Early the next morning, a cloud of dust swept up the valley from the north. In an hour or two, officers with glasses could make out the column—it was Gibbon's men. No doubt Custer was with them.

A white scout now rode into the lines with a note from General Terry for Custer. Two escaping Crow scouts, it stated, had reported that Custer's forces had been badly defeated and most of them killed.

Dumfounded, the officers looked at one another. A minute later, Lieutenant Bradley, in charge of General Gibbon's scouts, rode up. His face was white and drawn.

"Where's Godfrey?" he asked.

Lieutenant Godfrey stepped up and pressed his friend's hand.

"My God! tell us where Custer is?" Godfrey stammered out.

Tears came to the young officer's eyes. He pointed down the river.

"I've counted 197 bodies there on the hillside, three miles away," he whispered. "Custer must be among them."

Later Terry came up, and the following afternoon, the surviving troops of the Seventh buried their dead comrades. All these had been stripped of their clothes, and many had been mutilated. Custer alone had not been scalped. They found him lying in a little circle of some thirty men, his naked body stretched out between two troopers, a bullet hole in his left temple, and one in his left breast. There were no powder burns on his face or body, disproving the theory that he had taken his own life when he saw all was lost.

The body of Tom Custer was found some hundred feet to the west. It had been terribly mutilated, and was only identified when Lieutenant



The last hostile gone.

Godfrey caught sight of his tattooed initials "T. W. C." on his right forearm.

Carefully, the troopers buried the dead, and then bore their own fifty-two wounded down from Reno Hill, across the river, and started on the long trail of twenty miles to the junction of the Bighorn, where the steamer *Far West* lay.

Early in the morning of the 29th, the injured men were lifted from the hastily constructed mule litters, and carried to the deck of the steamer. Fresh, sweet-smelling grass covered the deck to the thickness of a foot, and clean tarpaulins had been spread over this. Here the men were placed, and every possible medical attention given them.

One other wounded veteran was helped on board—the only living thing found on the Custer battle-field—a buckskin sorrel called *Comanche* that had been Captain Keogh's personal mount. Troopers led him to the boat, put him on board, and for four years he was the special care of the whole regiment. When he died in 1880, an honored old campaigner, he was mounted and can this day be seen in the museum of Kansas University at Lawrence.

It was daybreak on the last day of June, when the Far West started on the journey down the Bighorn, down the Yellowstone, and then down the Missouri to Fort Abraham Lincoln.

Night and day, stopping for nothing, the little steamer hurried on its way.

At two o'clock in the morning of July 6, eleven days after the tragic battle, the steamer pushed its prow into the landing at Fort Lincoln. Captain McCaskey, commandant of the post, was immediately notified, and at once called all the officers together. Groups were assigned to break the news of the disaster to the thirty-nine widows at the post. To Captain McCaskey and Dr. Middleton fell the difficult task of telling Mrs. Custer and Mrs. Calhoun, the general's sister.

A little before seven that morning, the two officers started on their errand. Going to the rear of General Custer's quarters, they rapped on the door and awakened the housemaid, and instructed her to call her mistress and Mrs. Calhoun, and Miss Reed, sister of the general's namesake Autie Reed.

On their way through the hall Mrs. Custer

came to her door and inquired what the trouble was. She was asked to bring her sister-in-law and niece and come to the parlor.

Quietly they told them the terrible news: the general, his two brothers, his brother-in-law, his nephew, and five troops of his regiment, all wiped out in one sweep of destiny.

Custer luck long ago had brought him fame, and Custer luck now had brought him a gallant end, death and immortal glory at thirty-seven.

The three women sank to their knees and clung to one another.

They were not thinking of fame or glory this early morning in July of 1876.

THE END

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